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Arcane Stories

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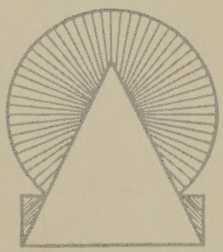

Arcane Stories — Third Series
by Francis Merchant

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1. THE WARS OF THE SQUARES AND THE TRIANGLES

History textbooks give much information about the Wars of the Roses, but they neglect to mention an even greater series of conflicts known as the Wars of the Squares and the Triangles.

The source of this great controversy was rooted in basic geometric differences. The Triangles accused the Squares of being too earthy, too strongly rooted in material things, too unimaginative because all their angles were too visionary, for the apex pointed upward, and too flighty — for the angles varied greatly.

These manifest differences caused much dissension. Each side insisted on its superiority and wanted laws passed that so declared. Rabble rousers on both sides stirred up so much agitation that the sense of separateness became a cause of war.

Long and fiercely the battles raged. There was devastation on both sides, and the casualties mounted as the struggle became more intense. In fact, they would no doubt have annihilated each other if a wise old Polygon hadn't intervened.

He called a conference that was attended by the leaders of both factions. Addressing them, he said, "For a long time you have waged cruel war, so that now you have come to the point of mutual extermination. And yet, upon careful examination, your differences are more apparent than real. Let me demonstrate to you the truth of my contention."

So saying, he held aloft a large flat that contained a square. Then he drew a diagonal from the top to the bottom, thus creating two triangles.

"As you see," he explained to his surprised listeners, "every square, when so divided, consists of two triangles. Your differences are therefore shown to be unreal. Actually, a square is nothing but a double triangle. Both sides should therefore recognize their common kinship and cease a fratricidal struggle that profits no one."

His words proved effective. Both sides signed a treaty of peace shortly thereafter. However, there were still some Squares and Triangles that grumbled.

"We're still superior because one of us is worth two of them," commented a Square.

"But we're more deserving," retorted a Triangle, "because we're apex-oriented, which is more than can be said for a Square."

2. ANGEL AND ABBOT

In the Middle Ages there was a monastery on the top of a hill to which many weary travelers, fatigued by their journeying, would repair for refreshment. They were never turned away, for the abbot of the monastery considered it a spiritual obligation to extend whatever help he could to those in need.

One day the abbot was seated in meditation, earnestly invoking the Source of All Good. As he pondered and prayed, a vision appeared. Before him stood an angel, surrounded by a golden light. The abbot gazed in rapt contemplation, absorbing the peace that seemed to flow from the visitant.

How long he gazed, he could not tell, for time seemed to stand still. Suddenly a series of heavy knocks resounded on the front door.

"It is some weary traveler come to find shelter," the abbot said to himself. What, then, should he do? If he rose and attended to the needs of the traveler, he might find when he returned that the angel had disappeared. On the other hand, if he stayed, he would compel a needy pilgrim to find shelter elsewhere.

Reluctantly he arose, looked resignedly at the angel, and left the room in order to attend to the needs of a dust-stained traveler.

When the monk returned, the angel to his great surprise, was still there.

Then the apparition spoke softly and gently, "Had you not gone to help the needy traveler, I myself would have been compelled to leave."

3. CATERPILLAR'S DESTINY

A sage was seated under a shade tree one summer's day, when he became aware of a caterpillar crawling on his trousers. He put his hand near the creature and it started to wiggle its way up his forefinger.

"Little caterpillar," he said, "you have a great destiny in store for you."

"Destiny?" exclaimed the caterpillar, pausing for a moment in its onward course, "what is that?"

"Some day," explained the sage, "you will sprout wings and fly. No longer will you be obliged to make your way so tediously over the earth. In a trice you will cover distances that now you can't travel in a day."

The caterpillar pondered the possibility. "But I don't care to fly. I like my present leisurely ways. It's nice to crawl about in dew-besprinkled grass in the morning or to wriggle my way across an old log. Flying would make me dizzy. The earth is good enough for me. I'll leave the sky to the flighty birds."

"But flying is your destiny," the sage pointed out.

"I'll postpone it as long as I can," replied the caterpillar. "I'm no more eager to fulfill my destiny than human beings seem to be in fulfilling theirs."

4. SPIDER LORE

A man looked out of his bedroom in the morning and beheld a series of spider webs that glistened with dew as the sun shone upon them. As he pondered the scene, his imagination was stirred, and he fell into a reverie.

He saw a group of young and inexperienced spiders gathered about an older specimen, who was telling them about the secret art of constructing webs.

"We ought to be very proud of being arachnids," said the old spider quietly yet authoritatively while his charges listened with respectful attention, "because we have been entrusted with a special gift. We are all creators who are able to manufacture out of ourselves the webs we build. Concealed within ourselves is all the material we need to produce the works of art that we daily devise."

He paused for a moment to let that thought sink into the consciousness of his listeners and then continued.

"You must remember, however, that a web is related in all its parts to the creator. In a sense, the whole universe is a web, similarly inter-related. You must exert the greatest care not to identify yourself with the web you devise; if you do, you will become entangled in what you yourself have spun — a fault that you may have occasion to note in unwise human beings."

"Suppose the web is destroyed," inquired one small spider, "what happens then?"

"That is a small matter," replied the old spider. "You are the source and can always construct another one. That great power has been conferred on you by Nature herself, and you should be everlastingly grateful that it is so. Unless you develop this understanding, you will be dismayed every time your web is swept away. Within yourself lies the creative power to build ever anew — and this is a great secret that not many creatures on the face of the earth have learned."

5. TO BE HONEST AND TRUTHFUL

A young man read a book about the importance of honesty and decided to practice this virtue as rigorously and strictly as possible.

When his employer invited him to a party, the young man wrote a note declining the invitation. "Your conversation is boring, and you wallow in trivia. Besides, all of you are insufferable opportunists, specimens of congealed egotism."

As a result of his honesty, the young man was discharged from his position.

The next day, his sister asked him his opinion of an expensive dress she had just bought. "You have no sense of harmony," he told her, "and prefer what is fashionable to what is beautiful. The dress is really a monstrosity, but no one will tell you so because it is the present vogue."

For the next week his sister refused to speak to him, but he could not understand why she seemed to be offended.

When asked, after taking a course in educational theory, to set down in

writing his evaluation of his teacher, the young man wrote: "To be honest, I must say that you have a monotonous voice and a haughty disposition. Your rambling presentations have been the source of endless perplexity and frustration to me. I am delighted that this course has finally come to an end."

The grade he received did not accord with his expectations.

Realizing that he was alienating others by his outspokenness, the young man sought help from an elderly philosopher.

"Why do I get into trouble when I am guilty of doing nothing but telling the truth?" queried the young man.

The philosopher mused for a while and then commented, "You are expressing your truth, but not the Greater Truth."

"How do you define the Greater Truth?" questioned the young man.

"The Greater Truth is that the world consists of innumerable human beings struggling imperfectly to manifest the divinity in them. The truth about them is best known to their own souls. You see their faults, but not their aspirations. Truth lies in the purpose for which this universe was brought into being. Your truths are critical judgments based on what you see through the tiny peephole of your mind. Perfection is achieved by imperfection."

6. A MOSQUITO IN AN ELEPHANT'S EAR

A mosquito once took refuge in the ear of an elephant and found it an ideal place to lodge. Ensconced in this aural cavity, the insect felt warm, safe, and comfortable.

As a matter of fact, the mosquito was so well pleased that it stayed in the elephant's ear for nine years.

At length, however, the insect felt that it was time for a change. Nine years is, after all, a long time to spend in a single place. Attracting the attention of the elephant, the mosquito announced its intention.

"For nine years I have lodged in your ear," the mosquito said, "but now, I regret to say, I have decided to leave."

"You say that you've decided to leave?" the elephant queried.

"I regret to tell you so," the mosquito explained, "but the world changes and I cannot in good conscience remain. I am sorry, but so it is. No doubt you will miss me, but all things eventually come to an end."

"It is good of you to tell me that you are leaving," the elephant replied musingly, "but I never knew that you had arrived."

7. A MESSENGER TO THE DARK COUNTRY

A great king dwelt in the Halls of Light, where harmony and beauty flourished.

One day a traveler came to him with a strange report.

"In the far-off, nether part of your great kingdom," he reported, "distressing conditions prevail. Whereas good reigns here, evil reigns there. Human beings are ignorant of their divine lineage, believing they are animals, and imitating them. Selfishness is the guiding rule, and fractricidal wars are commonplace eruptions."

The king pondered this disturbing news for some time. Listening with an inner ear, he heard the cry of pain that unceasingly sounds forth from the world of man. Finally he decided to call for volunteers who would leave the Halls of Light and go to the far country where ignorance and suffering were everywhere rampant.

The task of reclaiming the Dark Country proved to be a difficult undertaking. The envoys from the Halls of Light found their perspective warped by the chaotic conditions that prevailed in the land of ignorance and suffering. Living among the unbalanced, the violent, and the unprincipled, those who came to serve and to save became themselves confused. Then, too, the prince of the Dark Country exercised a negatively persuasive influence.

"We've organized life on this material plane according to my guidelines," the prince declared. "I give the people free scope for their selfishness, and they like it that way. Dissidents are easily discouraged, intimidated, or converted."

So it was that the envoys sent by the king who reigned in the Halls of Light failed to reclaim those to whom they were dispatched. One after another, they tried and failed.

At last the great king sent a trusted messenger, renowned for his wisdom.

In due time the sage arrived in the City of Man, from which the cries of pain and suffering rose to the heavens.

After careful investigation, the messenger made a significant discovery. The prince of the World had in some inconceivable manner stolen the common intelligence of the human race and hidden it in a leaden casket underneath a great mountain. Human beings, deprived of this discriminating faculty, blundered through life with no guiding lamp. Many, if not most, were unaware that they had lost so precious a possession.

The messenger set out to find the casket and thereby restore to mankind the Light that defines the spiritual path. Little has ever been recorded of the obstacles he surmounted. Temptations of every description were dangled before him, but he did not succumb. Lions and dragons sought to deflect him from his quest, but he remained undaunted.

At length he found the leaden casket wherein scintillated the Light of Intelligence. It seemed like a lantern whose beams cut the darkness with marvelous power.

One great task remained. The messenger had to persuade human beings to make use of this extraordinary power. It might be thought that this would be the easiest part of his quest, but it was not so. For so long had human beings been deprived of this faculty that they regarded it with the greatest suspicion. To this very day the messenger is trying to persuade them that it is a divine birthright without which they may stumble in darkness for a lifetime.

8. DIRECTION AND DESTINATION

A neophyte became disturbed by his lack of spiritual progress. He went to the Blessed One and complained.

"Despite all my efforts," the neophyte said, "I return to the same bed at night from which I arose in the morning."

The Blessed One smiled and raised his hand. As he did so, a vision flashed into the other's mind. The neophyte found himself in a murky atmosphere where black clouds swirled ominously. He saw the distorted faces of demons with red eyes glaring at him. He himself was pulling a heavy cart over a rough road at the direction of pitiless demons who whipped him when he flagged. It was a disagreeable and chilling sight.

When the neophyte returned to himself, he asked what the vision meant.

"You have just seen the destination toward which you proceed when you allow the passions to rule your life," the Blessed One explained. "However, there is a complementary picture" — and here he again raised his hand. A second vision appeared to the neophyte.

He saw himself seated on a beautiful, blue lotus while the air was filled with auroral lights. The stately music of the spheres pealed forth in grandeur, and the planets were seen to be shepherded about the sun by resplendent beings clothed in dazzling light.

When the vision vanished, the neophyte looked questioningly at the Blessed One.

"This is the destination toward which you move when you master the passional forces of your nature. Direction is not measured geographically, but spiritually. Saint and sinner sleep in the same bed, yet travel to altogether different destinations. Choose, then, the direction in which you desire to move."

9. THE GREATEST GIFT

The gift of life was bestowed on man, according to a Chinese legend, by the sacrifice of a Great Being. The sacrifice he made extends even unto the present day, for out of his body sprang the earth and all that is in it. His eyes became the sun and the moon; his voice, thunder; his breath, wind and clouds; his blood, the rivers and streams; his skin and flesh, the fields and the soil; his teeth and bones, metals and stones; his sweat, rain and swamps; his tears, human beings.

In order that man might evolve, the world in which he finds himself was created. It was born of sacrifice. All that human beings are required to do is evolve.

10. THE TREASURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A student with a wrinkled brow and scowling countenance was asked why he looked so perplexed. He thereupon explained his predicament in the presence of his teacher.

"I took a course in zoology," the student declared, "and what I learned disturbed me. A hawk possesses much keener sight than a human being. A dog is endowed with a superior sense of smell. The fleetness of the antelope is proverbial. An elephant can lift burdens that an ordinary man could not budge."

"Why do you find these rather well-known facts disturbing?" the teacher inquired.

"Don't you see?" the student exclaimed. "The animals are superior to me. No matter what I do, I cannot ever equal an elephant in strength, a hawk in eyesight, an antelope in swiftness, or a bat in hearing. I find it all very perplexing."

"Don't these facts suggest anything else to you?" questioned the teacher.

"They simply make me feel inferior," the student observed glumly.

"In point of fact," the teacher pointed out, "we may extract a far deeper meaning from the data you present. Some animals are indeed superior to man in the development of the senses. The destiny of human beings, however, is not concerned so much with the senses as with consciousness."

"Consciousness!" queried the student. "What do you mean?"

"The difference between the saint and the sinner lies in consciousness. The same may be said of man and the angels. The heights of consciousness have never been defined. What man can become is greater than the imagination is able to conceive. For man, evolution is concerned with the refinement and expansion of consciousness. Herein lies his treasure — but not in the senses. A stone is unconscious; an animal, conscious; a man, self-conscious; a spiritual person, God-conscious."

The student pondered the matter — and then slowly nodded his head.

11. THE ROSE AND THE THORN

In the beginning, rose bushes had no thorns. The flower bloomed, the petals unfolded, and a soft fragrance scented the air.

This development, however, was often thwarted. Attracted by the scent, dogs, rabbits, cows, and deer came to the rose bushes and promptly proceeded to eat the delicate petals. No sooner did the flower appear than it was devoured. After a time, the rose bushes refused to produce any more blossoms.

When that happened, the angel that supervises the evolution of the flower kingdom sought to alter the situation.

"Why do you refuse to blossom?" the angel asked a prototypic rose bush.

"I have been created for beauty," the rose bush declared, "but I cannot

fulfill my mission. Instead of appreciating my rare gifts, everyone uses me for food. They are gross materialists who believe that I was created to serve their stomachs instead of their aesthetic sense."

The angel pondered the matter and finally spoke. "I understand your predicament. However, I cannot approve your refusal to blossom. If you persist in your refusal to bloom, you will have to be eliminated from the earth."

"Isn't there any other choice?" the rose bush asked somewhat plaintively.

"Yes, there is," the angel said ruminatively. "If you would be willing to grow thorns, your problems would be solved."

"Thorns!" echoed the rose bush in consternation. "How could you expect me to grow such spiny monstrosities? I am a pacifist by nature and couldn't think of surrounding myself with war-like thorns."

"Think it over," counseled the angel. "You cannot get on in this world without protecting the gift you bear. If animals have claws, why shouldn't you have thorns?"

After the rose bush calmed down, it decided that thorns weren't so bad after all — and to this day it refuses to blossom without them.

12. PACKAGE AND CONTENT

The president of a business firm processing cereals received a somber report that his product wasn't selling; in fact, grocers complained that they were over-stocked. Responding to this disturbing news, he called a conference of his advisers and apprized them of the gloomy report.

"Well, what can we do about it?" he asked somewhat truculently.

"Perhaps we should improve the quality of our product," one adviser said rather hesitantly.

"Not at all," contradicted another. "I suggest that we improve the package, not the contents. Think how much we'd save if we did that. Cheapen the product and brighten the package — that's my advice."

The president pondered on these proposals and at last decided on an experiment. "In one region we'll improve the contents; in another, we'll brighten the package with gaudy colors. After a short time we'll find out which policy produces the most sales."

For several months the experiment was tried. At the end of that time, he called another conference and shared the results of the experiment.

"By improving the product, we achieved nothing; in fact, sales plummeted. However, by dressing up the package, we scored excellent results. Sales rose beyond anything we could possibly imagine. It's quite obvious, then, that the prosperity of this company is dependent on the package, not the content."

By following this policy, the firm prospered greatly. However, the news of this experiment spread, and soon the world of business became transformed. Manufacturers made clocks with fancy silver and gold numerals, but the material composing the machinery was shoddy. Optometrists made artistic

frames, but poor lenses. Pasty, blown-up bread was encased in gay and gaudy wrappers. Automobiles were well-styled, but the motors were made of inferior materials. So it went in one field after another.

Psychologists pondered this phenomenon. Finally, they issued a statement. "The whole world is a package," it declared, "whose essence is disregarded by most people. The search for the quality that characterizes forms presented to us should be a universal duty. In business, the preoccupation with appearance instead of reality is simply more apparent."

13. THE PATH OF THE ROSE

A young man came to a sage for guidance.

"Life is very perplexing," the young man said," and I am pulled in many directions. Can you give me any advice as to how I should cope with the complicated problems that are presented to me?"

The sage considered the question for a time and finally said, "Contemplate the rose."

The young man acted on the advice. He meditated for a long time on the nature of the rose, its blossoming, and unfoldment. The petals were qualities of the spirit that he had to manifest. The scent represented the fragrance of aspiration that he should diffuse into the atmosphere. Above all, his unfoldment should be rhythmic and silent — but the goal should be to manifest beauty.

This meditation had a curious effect on those who knew the young man. Some found fault with him and called him a foolish dreamer and an impractical idealist. Others were flattering and ministered to his sense of self-importance. He was so taken up by responding to these two attitudes that the quest became blurred.

Some time later, the young man chanced to see the sage once again. The latter inquired about his progress. The young man indicated his realizations and then explained that he had been abused by some and excessively praised by others. These responses had diverted him somewhat from his quest.

"In your meditation on the rose," the sage commented, "you seem to have forgotten about the thorns."

"Why are the thorns important?" the young man questioned.

"The rose bush, in its wisdom, creates not only the rose, but also the protective thorns. All beautiful things on earth must be defended. Whenever the rose of aspiration begins to bloom in the consciousness of a disciple, he must grow one thorn to meet abuse and another to oppose flattery. Such is the path of the rose."

14. MAN, THE TRANSFORMER

In the depths of the forest, a city-dweller came upon a hermit, who was seated in meditation.

The newcomer paused for a moment and then questioned the one who was meditating.

"What are you doing in this forsaken place, far from the amenities of civilization?"

"I am transforming energy," the hermit replied laconically.

The city-dweller did not find this response very enlightening.

"Would you mind explaining a little more clearly what you mean?"

The hermit regarded him with a quizzical glance. "Plants," he said, "transform sunlight and water into a living substance called cellulose. The process is called photosynthesis."

"That may be," retorted the city-dweller, "but I'm not talking about plants, but about you. I don't suppose that your activities are in any way related to photosynthesis, are they?"

"Human beings," responded the hermit, "transform food into the physical energy of motion."

"Anybody knows that," the city-dweller interjected.

"This is the lowest kind of transformation," the hermit explained gently. "The scientist converts this energy into thought; the poet, into imagination; the mystic, into aspiration."

"And what does the hermit do?" asked the city-dweller.

"The hermit transforms this energy into a rainbow of blessings and sends it across the world to aid all striving souls in their noble endeavors. And now, since you have asked me so many questions, I should like to address one to you. In what way are you transforming the energies you daily receive?"

The city-dweller, rather nonplussed, was silent.

15. UPHOLDERS OF THE WORLD

Greek mythology tells us that Atlas was assigned the task of holding the whole world on his shoulders. His burden was somewhat greater than that which an ordinary man is forced to carry.

Chinese legends inform us that the earth is upheld by eight columns. They constituted a link between heaven and our planet. When these columns were broken, disasters of diverse kinds were visited upon the human race.

These theories, although their origin is ancient, have a modern application.

Each age requires its Atlas to serve as a link between heaven and earth. Every human being is offered the opportunity to uphold the integrity of the world by standing as a column of sacrifice — solidly planted on the earth, but reaching upward by aspiration to the very stars.

Many people, unfortunately, may be described as broken columns — but the few who bear the burden of human follies and unswervingly stand in spiritual being are the lightbearers and heroes of the age.

16. A CRISIS IN SERVICE

At an advanced age, William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was stricken with blindness.

It was a soul-shattering crisis. His mind had been teeming with plans and projects for social and spiritual upliftment. His influence had spread around the globe, and he felt himself in a position to serve the human race on a universal scale. All of a sudden, a dark curtain descended and shut out the light of day. The gift of sight that he had for so many years taken for granted was withdrawn. Now he had to be led by hand wherever he chose to go.

The cherished plans for the betterment of the world had to be renounced. The encompassing veil of darkness compelled him to relinquish the dynamic role he had found so congenial and rewarding. It was as if a higher power had intervened and called a halt to his creative activities.

Faced with such a crisis, many men would have lost faith and despaired.

Booth pondered and prayed, and a light shone into his darkness. "In the past," he said, "I served God with sight; now I shall serve him without." The path of service, he realized, can be trodden even by the blind.

17. THE TORTOISE

I was walking along the seashore, watching the white foam of the waves in the distance, when I came upon a tortoise. It moved slowly and sedately, pausing now and then as it progressed to an unknown destination.

"How slowly it moves," I said aloud. "It would weary me to be obliged to travel at that pace."

The tortoise heard what I said and answered me by uttering strange sounds that registered in my mind as language patterns.

"You're a fine one to talk," said the tortoise. "The human race has moved onward spiritually at a much slower pace than I for the last hundred thousand years."

For a moment I couldn't believe what I heard, but I soon recovered my composure and continued the conversation.

"It may be so," I countered, "but in this age of speed, you certainly seem to be out of tune with the times."

"You don't seem to have any understanding of what I symbolize," the tortoise replied a little petulantly.

"I wasn't aware that you symbolized anything," I confessed.

"Just as I thought," said the tortoise. "Ancient scholars knew better. In a far-off age I was a symbol of time — time that moves slowly and steadily on its mysterious course. The minutes creep, and so do I. Your distant ancestors lived through the same twenty-four hours as you do now. But I symbolize more than that."

"In what way?" I questioned.

"Regard me carefully," admonished the tortoise. "What do you see?"

I scrutinized it curiously before replying. "You have a carapace, four legs, and a head."

"Like many of your fellows, you have no head for symbolical truth," the tortoise said a little disdainfully. "You see facts, but overlook meanings."

"I have been educated to prize facts," I said defensively, "and I tell you what I see."

"Then your education has been at fault," the tortoise snapped.

"Suppose you tell me what meaning I ought to derive by contemplating your form."

"Ancient philosophers noted that my back is arched, like the sky," the tortoise explained. "On the other hand, my bottom is flat like the earth on which I crawl. Thus I symbolize the cooperation of sky and earth in the interests of evolutionary life."

"What about your feet?" I asked.

"You will note that I have four," the tortoise responded. "Psychologically or symbolically speaking, you, too, move on four feet that are represented by past, present, and future.

"But that's only three," I corrected. "What is the fourth?"

"The fourth is purpose," the tortoise declared, "and on that foot you limp badly."

18. ENERGY

A perplexed student, beset by difficult life problems, came to a metaphysician for counsel.

"The complexities of life are so great that I find myself distressed, distraught, and depressed. Can you give me a principle to which I might hold when my world seems to be falling to pieces?"

The metaphysician pondered for a long moment and then said, "I shall give you three words that will serve to strengthen you in the trials and tribulations of life."

"What are they?" the student asked eagerly.

"All is energy," the metaphysician replied. "Meditate as best you can on this theme."

The student left, but returned a week later.

"I must confess that your statement has confused more than helped me," he complained. "I understand that we live in a world of energies and that mat-

ter as we view it is an illusion, but how does this realization help me face my daily problems?"

"What do we do with energy?" the metaphysician asked.

"Why, we use it to make the wheels of the world go around," the student replied.

"What use have you made of the vast stores of energy at your disposal?" the metaphysician continued.

"The universe may be nothing but energy," the student retorted, "but I don't seem to be able to harness it."

"The first source of energy that you must learn to tap," the metaphysician explained, "is that of understanding. Man is born with a vast amount of ignorance which he is supposed to transmute. The first task of every human being is to light the candle of understanding and to keep it lit for a lifetime."

"I can understand that," the student exclaimed.

"The second energy is that of resistance," the metaphysician went on. "Every person who thinks meets resistance from those who do not. Inertia pulls him to the past; understanding, toward the future. Unless he develops the energy of resistance, he will be unable to follow the vision that understanding has brought him."

"That seems logical," the student commented.

"The third form is the energy of repulsion. Every great soul, in affirming the good, must repel what is evil. The light must shine in the darkness, not be smothered by it. He who carries a lamp on his head is a ready target for those who stand in the shadows. Now do you understand?"

The student was silent for a moment and then declared, "Why didn't you say that in the first place?"

19. THE COMPASS

An elderly man, who had held an executive position for a generation, was told that he must retire from active service. He found it difficult to give up the work that had grown familiar to him in the course of many years. Day and night he brooded over the matter, growing more resentful as the time approached for his withdrawal.

Deeply disturbed, he went to a psychologist and poured out his frustrations and complaints.

The psychologist let him speak on until the tide of emotion had been spent.

When the elderly man had finished, the psychologist picked up a compass that was lying on the desk.

"What has a compass to do with my problem?" the elderly man expostulated. "Here I talk to you about the gross injustice of forced retirement, and you ask me about a schoolboy's toy!"

"Look more carefully at the compass," the psychologist admonished.

"What do you observe?"

"I don't see what that has to do with me," the elderly man remonstrated. "But just to satisfy you, I'll say it has two arms and is used to describe a circle."

"One arm stands steady at the center, doesn't it?" the psychologist explained, "while the other moves along the circumference."

"Well, what of that?" questioned the elderly man somewhat gruffly.

"Both arms need each other," the psychologist continued. "In other words, the active life depends on the contemplative. Together, they describe the course of a man's life."

"I begin to see your point," the elderly man said slowly.

"You have been moving on the circumference of life. Now you are called upon to stand at the center — to stand in spiritual being. It is not an imposition, but an opportunity."

When the elderly man arose to take his leave, his face was more tranquil and thoughtful.

20. SYMBOLISM

"The world is filled with symbols," said a poet to an assembled group of students. "They confront us on every hand and act as directional signposts."

"Somehow, I don't seem to see them," one student commented. "Would you mind explaining where we can find these directional sign posts?"

"Let me be specific," the poet replied. "To begin with, we observe that the sun traces a path in the heavens from east to west. Astronomy tells us that the earth, rather than the sun, moves. Thus we discover that we live in a world of illusions, and that common assumptions based on the data of the senses is false. In a similar manner, many of our unexamined beliefs about life and other human beings are also incorrect."

"That sounds logical," the student admitted, "but you are really calling for a lifetime of pondering in order to sift the real from the unreal."

"Exactly," the poet declared. "That's the direction towards which symbolism points. Then, too, our manner of seeing the world about us depends on the station point we assume in looking towards the horizon. Perspective tells us that the size of an object depends not on its actual dimensions, but on its distance — another illusion. So, too, do we behold greatness of soul in accordance with our psychological perspectives."

"Life would have a different flavor if viewed from a spiritual perspective, wouldn't it?" the student observed.

"Just so," nodded the poet. "Educational institutions symbolize the need to transmute ignorance, of which there is an abundant supply, into knowledge. Law courts remind us that the scales of justice must be put to use in the life of every thoughtful person. The theater tells us that the human enterprise is part of a cosmic drama. Hospitals should cause us to ponder the need

not only of physical health, but of the need to heal the soul. Death is also a symbol. We die to the present in order to live in the future. Tomorrow can arrive only when today has gone."

"It seems to me," the student reflected, "that a study of symbolism, as you present it, could cast light on the destiny of mankind."

"You are right," the poet agreed. "Man himself is the greatest symbol — but he can't fathom its meaning. When he gains an insight into his symbolical significance in the universe, a new era will dawn for the sons of men."

21. PRISON REFORM

An idealist who was devoted to prison reform appeared before a learned judge and pleaded eloquently for the abolition of cruel and inhuman punishment for all prisoners.

After he had finished, the judge interrogated him. "Are you concerned about the fate of all prisoners or only about a select few?"

"I am concerned about all prisoners without any exception," the reformer answered promptly.

"Much depends on the definition of prisoner and prison," the judge declared.

"I am talking about all the different forms of abridging liberty," the reformer specified.

"In that case," said the judge, "you are talking about yourself, and, by inference, the rest of the human race."

"Myself?" queried the reformer. "I do not follow your logic."

"Are you not a prisoner of the fragile body in which you function? You came into the world helpless — a clear abridgment of your freedom. You are subject to disease and death — which may be designated cruel and inhuman punishment. Are you not a prisoner of earth, time, space, and of your own passions?"

"Your Honor," cried the reformer, "you are misinterpreting my meaning. I'm talking about prisoners who languish in yonder jail."

"I understand that," the judge declared, "but when you talk of prisoners in the broad sense, you enlarge the horizon considerably. Are not all of us condemned for life in this dewdrop world, comparatively speaking, to see how well we are able to maneuver in restricted, and sometimes unfortunate, circumstances?"

"That may be, Your Honor," the reformer expostulated, "but I'm concerned with prisoners as the law defines them, not with the entire human race."

"Why not expand your definitions?" the judge queried. "Those who are incarcerated in man-made prisons are part of a much larger problem. If you would expand your views, you would seek the betterment of the whole human race, not simply the condition of a small group of law-breakers."

"Your Honor, I'm a reformer, not a philosopher."

"You might consider the possibility of reforming yourself first and thereby becoming a philosopher," the judge remarked, thus ending the dialogue.

22. THE DOUBTER

An educator who had given many years to the study of philosophy developed a state of mind that made him indecisive and vacillating. He found himself doubting everything he was told. Arriving at any conclusion required an extremely great effort. As other people sought certainties, he prized doubts. This condition of perpetual indecision became so marked that his friends took him to an erudite teacher for instruction and cure.

"The value of a doubt," the teacher remarked, "is to lead toward a certainty."

"I question that line of thought," the educator countered. "I am satisfied with doubting and need no certainties. In fact, they would trouble me greatly if they could be proved to exist."

"What virtue do you find in doubt?"

"It relieves me of the necessity of doing anything," the educator replied. "All action is based on an assumed conclusion. If I can prove all rules, all guidelines, all moral codes questionable, I can then be justified in doing as I please. I also enjoy the satisfaction of feeling superior to everyone I meet, for I can dispute with sage and philosopher simply by doubting every proposition they advance."

"Do you doubt that the universe is ruled by ultimate justice?"

"Of course," the educator declared. "Good and evil are man-made concepts."

"Do you doubt that we are conversing together at this moment?"

"Calendars are a human invention," the educator explained. "They may be convenient, but they break up time into fragments, whereas time is really a unified whole."

"Do you doubt your own existence?" the teacher inquired.

"Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't," the educator answered. "Perhaps the whole of our existence is nothing but a dream, and one day we'll wake up."

"Do you doubt that you are doubting?"

"You assume that the *I* has free will, but a case can be made for the belief that every thought is an inevitable consequence of what preceded it."

"You have demonstrated the theory of universal doubting very well," the teacher observed. "Permit me, now, to express a doubt that arises in my mind concerning you."

"What is it?" the educator asked.

"I doubt that you are teachable."

23. THE DRAGON CALLED LIFE

I was wandering over a craggy mountain side while a brisk and cutting wind crimsoned my face when I came upon the dragon who is sometimes known as the Spirit of Life. He was engaged in the task of molding clay into all sorts of geometric forms. At first I looked on in silence, but when he cast a questioning glance in my direction, I spoke.

"For many years I've wondered what you thought of the human race," I ventured.

"Few succeed in grasping my deeper meaning," he replied without desisting from his work.

"How do you define success and failure?"

"The earth's a school, but its inhabitants seldom achieve this realization."

"If the earth is a school," I remarked, "then there should be grades, curricula, and graduates."

"So there are," the dragon declared, "but not many graduate. I set hurdles of various kinds in their paths, but in all too many instances they fail to overcome these obstacles."

"How is that?" I inquired.

"They become slaves of master passions, for example," he elucidated, "and thus make themselves ineligible for graduation. Some make reason the slave of drink; others, of drugs; still others, of sex; and a goodly number, of money. In one way or another, they enslave themselves — and I do not permit anyone who has sold himself into slavery to graduate."

"Doesn't anyone every graduate?" I questioned.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "there are a few in each generation who pass my tests. They are wise and courageous souls who reach for the jewels that I bestow on those who surmount my hurdles."

"Such rare individuals must be world-renowned figures," I observed.

"Not at all," he responded. "They are often very obscure persons who are called opprobrious names and dismissed as foolish dreamers and idealists."

24. THE INVISIBLE FOCUS

An astonomer presented a lecture on the movement of heavenly bodies. After it was over, he was accosted by a student who had given years to the study of mathematics.

"You mentioned that the earth and the other planets describe an elliptical orbit about the sun, did you not?" the mathematician inquired.

"Quite right," the astronomer responded.

"A circle has but one center," the mathematician observed, "but an ellipse has two foci."

"That is so," the astronomer conceded. "The circumference of an ellipse contains all points whose combined distances from the two foci are equal."

"You also said that the sun is placed at the right hand focus."

"Admittedly," the astronomer concurred.

"What, then, is at the other focus?" the mathematician wanted to know.

"You touch on a very abstruse matter," the astronomer declared. "The ordinary view is that the second focus is invisible and therefore of no consequence."

"Is any other hypothesis possible?"

"There is," the astronomer said. "Mystics say that the unseen focus is the invisible sun — a center of power on which the construction of the ellipse depends. Mathematically speaking, the focus that the human eye cannot see must be a determining influence, for it exerts a power equal to that of the visible sun."

"Why is it that this concept is so little known?"

"Men are somewhat more inclined to acknowledge the influence of the sun they can see than of the invisible focus that mathematics asserts must exist in every ellipse, whether it be drawn on earth or in the distant sky."

"Would you say, then," the mathematician queried, "that there is evidence for the existence of two suns — one visible, and the other, invisible?"

"Every ellipse provides demonstrable evidence," the astronomer affirmed. "That two foci exist is incontestable. How many generations it will take the human race to respond to this invisible focus is an open question."

25. THE MESSENGER CALLED DAY

I am a day — one of about three hundred sixty-five messengers sent to man by the philanthropic year.

Early in the morning I pull aside the curtain of night and allow the resplendent colors of dawn to paint the mountain peaks. Shafts of coruscating light play upon the globe, dispelling the circumambient dark. I bring delight to all who comprehend the joy of the beginning.

I am universal, conferring my gifts upon all who inhabit the planet. My philanthropy is inclusive. Man, animal, and plant all receive the favoring rays of daylight. The sun, who always accompanies me, irradiates all parts of the globe with its golden essence.

To man I bring the revelation that comes with sight. Whereas night wraps the world in a mantle of darkness, I, the day, bring him the vision of the earth — its towering mountains, sinuous rivers, expansive plains, and majestic oceans. I present to him the mystery of color — the rose, the brownish soil, the green vegetation, the gray stones, the crystal waters, the golden sunbeams.

With me I bring the whirling dancers called the hours, who pirouette from dawn to dusk. This is the gift of time, bestowed equally on all men to do with as they deem best. Out of this invisible essence saints fashion a crown, and sin-

ners, a chain. In measured rhythm the hours pass, each one different from all the rest — yet each one is filled with the promise of great possibilities. Within this framework of time, a man may rise to the status of a beast.

In all that I do, beauty is manifest. Both dawn and sunset flood the world with the effulgence of radiant light.

Even when I have completed my mission, I draw aside a veil and reveal the majestic tapestry of the stars and the wonder of the far-off worlds.

I am the day — a recurring messenger, holding in my right hand the vase of destiny.

26. HIDDEN TREASURE

The original artificers of the world decided to hide a multitude of treasures wherever they could so that man might develop his resourcefulness in finding them.

Deep within the earth, they hid gold and precious stones. In pitchblende, they concealed radium. Copper, silver, and coal they stored in secret places.

In the sea, they hid the beautiful corals. Encrusted in the shells of oysters, they fashioned gleaming pearls.

In man they placed a skeleton framework of hard bone that they carefully covered with soft and yielding flesh.

All this man, the persistent searcher, has already discovered, but his discoveries are far from complete. Securely hidden within the recesses of his being lies the indivisible soul, but the psychologists, biologists, and anatomical dissectors have not succeeded in finding it. Then there is the magical essence called life, on which the physical mechanism depends — a quiddity undetectable even by the most efficient microscope.

What else lies hidden in man that awaits the day of discovery? Mystics say that all our findings to date are but prefatory. Pearls and diamonds and lotuses lie buried within the recesses of consciousness. Those who dig mines in order to obtain precious ores provide us with a symbol of what ought to be done within the confines of the deep self. Man is himself a treasure house, yet he is unaware of the essential radium that lies within the pitchblende of his ordinary awareness.

27. SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

For many centuries human beings failed to understand the mechanism of the eye that causes them to see the varied objects of the surrounding world. In the fifteenth century, Italy's discovery of perspective cast a new light on the entire subject. According to this theory, the position of the eye at any given time defines the horizon. This effect is illusory because the parallel lines — of

railroad tracks, for example, do not meet anywhere.

The eye, then, deceives us. However, all distant objects are related to the viewer's horizon. On psychological and spiritual levels, a comparable phenomenon may exist. Those whose horizon is limited will differ from those whose horizon is more inclusive.

The vanishing-point may be depicted on a drawing board, but it is not evident in nature.

The mystic, pursuing these speculations further, may find that the whole human drama has its vanishing-point in God.

If physical vision follows the laws of perspective, what shall we say of its spiritual counterpart? Are all human beings, separate though they seem to be, receptacles for the life that flows to them from the great vanishing point which is unseen and undetected?

It has taken the human race thousands of years to develop the theory of natural perspective. How long will it take to comprehend the nature of spiritual perspective?

28. THE FLAME OF THE CANDLE

I am the flame of a candle — born when a matchhead was rubbed on a rough surface and then applied to a wick.

Ever upward do I move, like a finger pointing at the sky. It is my nature to war against the dark and to brighten the place where I am put. So strong is my vibratory rate that the tallow diminishes steadily until it can no longer sustain me. No matter how heavy the cloak of the surrounding darkness may be, I defy it with fervent resolution.

I burn, I warm, I radiate — and by so doing, I symbolize the fiery will that lives in every human being. Would that men followed my example. I also dispel shadows, oppose the cold, and reduce forms to ashes.

Dangerous is my burning, for I can be the cause of a great conflagration. Those who approach me too closely will be scorched.

On the other hand, the warmth I give is gentle and reassuring; yet I war not only against the dark, but also against the chilling numbness of the cold.

Placed in a window at night, I radiate beams of light that can be seen from afar. The spirit that animates me has a kinship with the stars.

What the darkness seeks to conceal, I reveal. Men carry me at night in order to find their way.

Above all, I symbolize the candle that every man must light within the dark depths of his own consciousness in order to move purposefully through the mists of earthly life. To light me is comparatively easy, but to kindle the inner candle of the spirit is somewhat more difficult.

29. THE SUSTAINING EARTH

I am the earth, and for untold centuries I have orbited the sun, bearing on my back the whole cargo of the human race. Of course, human beings seldom realize what a burden it is for me to sustain them for so many thousands of years as I whirl on my cosmic path.

I am as indispensable as the sun. Evolution is possible only because of our aeonic cooperation. I provide the foundation while the sun contributes its warmth, light, and radiance.

Many treasures are hidden in my depths. My soil has magical properties, for the seeds hidden therein are persuaded to germinate and grow. Human beings are also one of my chief treasures, but they have not as yet discovered why it is so. In this regard, they seem to be a bit backward.

I have a number of brother and sister planets, all engaged in the same evolutionary work as I am. Sometimes they communicate with me. Venus, for example, views rather disapprovingly the manner in which human beings define love. Mars thinks that men are sufficiently martial, but that they fight the wrong wars. Saturn believes that the human race is too undisciplined and boastful. Mercury holds that mankind in general is clever materialistically, but rather obtuse spiritually. How I can convey all this to the billions of people who daily walk on my surface is a great problem. Only a rare seer is ever able to communicate with me.

Human beings carry their burdens for the brief time-period of a single lifetime, but I go on for endless ages. If they gave thought to this consideration, they might be more patient and less fretful.

30. THE STREAM AND THE SEA

From the distant mountains I have come, leaping precipitately over craggy rocks to the plains, for I am a stream.

I do not stop in my journeying, but move ever onward. The parched plains are nourished by my passage, and in my wake flowers and plants rise in appreciative salutation. They want me to stay, but I am driven onward by an irresistible urge.

Sometimes I ask myself whither I am wandering. What is my destination? I move briskly on and on, but where am I going?

A tributary that flowed into my channel had a strange notion.

"You have a rendezvous with the sea," it declared.

"What a curious thought," I observed.

"Do you realize what will happen when you merge with the vast and inscrutable sea?" the tributary asked. "You will lose your identity as a stream and become part of a much greater whole. Even the pure water you bear will become briny. Why, it's almost like entering Nirvana and losing all sense of your separate personality."

I found these considerations rather disturbing. Did I really wish to become part of the unfathomable sea? What would it be like to renounce the form that had grown so familiar to me? For a time I even slackened my brisk pace to ponder this new possibility.

Then it occurred to me that I must fulfill my destiny. Was it not a call to greatness? Did not all streams live a rather circumscribed life, limited by two shores? I thought of the majesty and expansiveness of the vast sea that accepted innumerable tributaries flowing into it. How grand a destiny it was to fulfill the great mission of renewing the parched plains and then slipping into the vastness of the all-receiving sea!

Eagerly, then, I hurried onward, grateful that there was a higher destiny to which I could strive.

31. STAR TRAVELS

The lure of travel has led many men to move over the face of the earth from continent to continent. Some people are driven by the wanderlust to visit far-off places. Such travel, however, is confined to the planet, but I have an inclination to pass beyond these circumscribed boundaries.

I choose to wander among the stars and to cultivate the acquaintance of Hercules, Andromeda, Orion, and Perseus — all of whom are mentioned in ancient mythology. Star companions are agreeable friends.

Some time ago I was meditating on Polaris and fancied that this brilliant star sent me a challenging message.

"The axis of the earth," Polaris seemed to say, "has been pointing at me for ages and ages like an indicating finger. This fact has indeed been noticed by mariners at sea, who direct their ships in accordance with my guidance."

"Is there any deeper significance to this scientific phenomenon?" I questioned.

"Of course there is," Polaris replied. "The people of the earth accept my guidance in geographical matters, but they have almost no inkling that I also give spiritual direction."

"It's true," I said, "that every compass on this planet points to you, but how can this be construed in any other than a physical manner?"

"Spirit and matter," Polaris explained patiently, "are manifestations of the North and the South poles of being. Earth represents matter, and I represent spirit. Man is supposed to move from the materiality of the earth to the spirituality of a light-radiating star. Therein may be read a clue to human destiny."

"How is it that no one has ever thought of that before?" I asked.

"That's what I've been wondering all these centuries while I've stood as a symbol written on the sky for the whole world to see."

32. THE BURDEN OF WORLD WRONG

"I am troubled by the manifold evidences of evil in the world," a business man told his psychiatrist. "The newspapers are filled with instances of crime, suicide, fraud, cruelty, and blundering. When I think of the folly of the human race, its repudiation of human values, its willful persistence in demonstrated error, I become frustrated, nervous, and irritable. The woe of the world is a burden too great for me to bear."

"You aren't called upon to bear it," the psychiatrist explained. "Just contemplating it is apparently sufficient to wear you out."

"But the fact that I am aware of so much that is wrong but can't do anything about it makes it all the worse," the business man declared.

"Would you prefer to remain in ignorance?" the psychiatrist asked.

"No, for then I would remain a naive simpleton."

"But when you contemplate the world predicament, you almost collapse," the psychiatrist said. "Isn't that so?"

"I'm caught on the horns of a dilemma," the business man admitted. "What am I to do?"

"A return to ignorance is certainly not the answer," the psychiatrist observed. "You must carry the burden of the world's evil, but not allow it to oppress you."

"How can that be done?" the business man queried.

"Do you remember the mythological tale of the Gorgon Medusa? Her hair consisted of writhing and hissing snakes. So horrid did she look that all who saw here were petrified by the sight and turned into stone."

"What has all that to do with me?" the business man wanted to know.

"Medusa symbolizes the evil of the world," the psychiatrist explained. "Theseus killed her by looking indirectly at her in a mirror."

"A mirror?"

"Yes," affirmed the psychiatrist. "You must look at the world's woe indirectly as in a mirror. Stand persistently in the light of your soul and watch the shadow-dance of outer happenings indirectly."

The business man thoughtfully nodded acquiescence.

33. CURSING AND BLESSING

In every country in the world, the act of swearing has many votaries. Every language has a vocabulary of oaths, profanities, and obscenities. Military men in particular seem to believe that foul abuse is an efficacious incentive to those who lack motivation. The art of cursing thus appears to be securely established among the universal customs of the human race.

A movement has been started by a psychologist to change this age-old habit. He found a significant correlation between swearing and mental health. The incentive to think along this line came when he meditated on the theme,

"It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." He conducted a number of experiments that clearly proved blessing to be more beneficial than swearing.

For example, an apple tree that was subjected to a constant stream of curses produced less fruit than one that was periodically blessed. In his experiments, he found many persons who volunteered to curse, but few who were proficient in the art of blessing. In fact, some of the experimenters declared that they were constitutionally indisposed to bless, for they had never learned how it is done.

Further experiments showed that children who were verbally abused were more backward in their studies than those who were blessed.

Inmates of insane asylums who had been declared incorrigible at an early age, recovered rapidly when they took a course in the theory and art of blessing.

Prisoners who were acknowledged recidivists were soon rehabilitated when they spent fifteen minutes a day sending forth blessings upon the world — prisoners who responded to no other form of treatment.

A philologist has been assigned the task of finding benedictory equivalents for all the foul and abusive words in the English language. His work will no doubt take him many years to complete.

In spite of all our educational institutions, there is a great shortage of those who have mastered even the rudiments of the art of blessing. It has been suggested that the ranks of the unemployed could be vastly reduced if the jobless could be taught the simple technique of creative blessing.

34. FREEDOM AND REBELLION

According to Greek mythology, Boreas is the director of all the winds that blow from the North Pole. Every winter he sends a few of his myrmidons southward, and their chilling breath makes multitudes of people shiver.

Usually, the subordinate winds are very obedient, but on a certain occasion one of them proved to be rebellious. He was a sub-zero blast who could freeze a stream by exhaling three breaths.

"I demand more freedom," said the blast of arctic air to Boreas. "Why can't I do as I please instead of always following your orders?"

Before Boreas could reply, the blast of arctic air had advanced post-haste southward and was cavorting about in the temperate zone. It happened to be summertime, and the fields were filled with the varied produce that farmers are accustomed to grow.

While the blast was traveling about the countryside and enjoying his newfound freedom, a numbing chill fell upon the growing crops. Grains, fruits, and flowers first wilted and then perished.

Human beings became panic stricken. The food on which they depended for sustenance was being destroyed in the fields. Greatly dismayed, they sent a delegation to Boreas, begging him to refrain from summer visits.

Acknowledging the justice of their grievance, Boreas summoned the blast of cold air that had been responsible for the damage.

"Your definition of freedom," Boreas declared, "is faulty. No one is free. All things are bound together by invisible strands. By doing as you pleased, you brought havoc to the human race. All laws are limits to freedom — and this is a universe of law. Only thus can the worlds be preserved. What excuse, then, can you find for your mischievous conduct?"

"I can only plead," the blast rejoined, "that I once blew through a lecture hall where professors defined freedom improperly — so I imagined that they really understood what they were discussing. I see now that I was mistaken."

35. TRANSFORMATIONAL TECHNIQUES

"There are so many books and so many theories about meditation and occultism," a student complained to a metaphysician, "that my head is in a whirl. I don't know what to believe — and, more importantly, what to do. Can't you tell me in simple terms what it's all about? Which transformational techniques would you recommend?"

The metaphysician pondered a moment before answering. "A mystic of the West named Brother Lawrence developed a technique that he called 'the practice of the presence of God.' A sage of India known as Shankaracharya recommended the repetition of four words, 'I am the Eternal.' Another technique involves the iteration of the brief sentence, 'Let good befall the world.' A meritorious method consists of persistent blessing — blessing the purposes of the Highest so that they might manifest in greater power among men, thus planting lighted thought in the vast acreage of space. Some persons have derived benefit by imagining that they are lamps sending forth the light of creative thought to all quarters of the earth."

"You have given me in a few words," the student observed, "what it would take a lifetime for me to practice."

36. WIRES OF GOD

As I returned home one day, I pressed the electric switch, but the light did not go on. Investigation showed that the bulb had burned out and had to be replaced.

The next night the switch again failed. This time, I discovered, a fuse had blown out.

On a third occasion, the pressing of the switch again produced no result. This time the plug had not been properly inserted in the socket.

I pondered on these mishaps, trying to elaborate their significance. In all these cases, the electricity was available, but the mechanism conveying it was

faulty. A malfunctioning bulb or fuse interrupted the flow of the current and prevented the light from shining.

The energies of the spirit, I pondered, are also available, but we may lack the wires to conduct it, or the fuse to regulate it; or perhaps we have failed to connect the source with the mechanism of expression.

The entire human race may be conceived to be a network of wires through which potent energies might flow — if only the units knew how to create the spiritual equivalent of a light bulb.

On the physical level, those who travel in airplanes at night have witnessed the beauty of cities that glitter in the dark with brilliant light. How much more stirring it would be if human beings could be seen from above as stations of spiritual light, steadily shining and illuminating the earth.

At present, that is but a vision. Too many people might be described as unlit bulbs. Some persons have the proper lamps, but fail to insert the plug in the socket. Again, there are those whose light shines for a brief period, but the powerful current burns out the bulb. A life of unrealized potential might be characterized as a short-circuit in eternity.

37. THE USE OF PROVERBS

A certain lecturer declared that much of the world's wisdom is to be found in time-worn proverbs.

"There is more understanding to be found in common folk sayings," he declared, "than in the doctoral theses that gather dust in the archives of our universities. To prove the truth of this contention, I shall answer any questions that members of this audience care to ask by simply quoting an appropriate proverb. I now give you an opportunity to test my basic thesis."

After a moment of silence, members responded to the challenge.

"Why is it," one person asked, "that so many people deny in practice the idealism they profess in theory?"

"Few are fit to be entrusted with themselves," the lecturer answered.

"What would you say to a person who has been disappointed in his hopes and frustrated in his ambitions?"

"He gains a great deal who loses in vain hope."

"What advice can you offer to older people who are troubled by the loss of youth?"

"Like lavender, grow sweeter as you grow older."

"How can a woman test the quality of a man's love?"

"The measure of our sacrifice is the measure of our love."

"How does one respond to those who habitually postpone the fulfillment of promises by putting off everything until tomorrow?"

"Now is yesterday's tomorrow."

"Why are the lives of good men so often filled with trials and tribulations?"

"God promises a safe landing, but not a calm passage. Again, afflictions are the staves of the ladder that ascends to heaven."

"Why is it so hard for people to make progress?"

"An old error has more friends than a new truth."

"What would you say to a person who is never satisfied, no matter how much he earns?"

"Man always strives to get a bigger bit than will go into his mouth."

38. PRAYER WHEEL

A tourist visiting a monastery in Asia came upon a prayer wheel. It contained a compartment where a sheaf of papers was stored — papers on which prayers were written.

The tourist turned the wheel several times, and then stood there in perplexed reflection.

A monk who had watched him observantly walked over and started a conversation.

"I noticed that you seemed perplexed," the monk commented.

"You observed correctly," the tourist admitted. "It seems very odd to me that the mechanical turning of this wheel should be classified as praying. I don't even know what's written on the sheaf of papers I have been rotating. I find this practice very questionable."

"Does the turning of the wheel suggest anything else to you?" the monk probed.

"I don't know that it does," the tourist frankly confessed.

"Are there not wheels within yourself as well as outside?" the monk suggested.

"I hadn't thought of that," the tourist acknowledged.

"Many men turn the wheel of ambition for a lifetime," the monk observed. "We are more concerned with the wheel of aspiration."

"You cast an entirely different light on the subject."

"We seek to turn the wheel of compassion daily and hourly. As a cart is drawn by wheels, so are our lives directed by the wheels of thought, meditation, and reasonableness. They will not turn themselves, but must be set in motion by a deliberate act of the will. Our very destiny is dependent on the wheels that we set awhirl within ourselves."

"Are you saying that the prayer wheel is really a symbol, a reminder of the inner wheels that every man ought to set in motion?"

"Rightly have you understood," the monk nodded.

39. THE ATHEIST

A young man who attended a well-known university informed the members of his family when he graduated that his studies had made him an atheist. "The need for the postulate that God created man is unnecessary," he asserted.

His parents were understandably bewildered. They had sacrificed much to pay for his education at a highly reputable institution of learning and were dismayed by the results of his exposure to so-called culture. Deeply disturbed, they asked a metaphysician to talk to the young graduate. A meeting was arranged, and the two confronted each other.

"Would you mind stating your religious convictions?" the metaphysician requested.

"Gladly," rejoined the young man. "My studies have made me a confirmed atheist."

"How do you account for the world about you — the earth, the sun, and the stars?"

"Accident and chance are the determining factors."

"You would then make a God of accident?" inquired the metaphysician.

"I didn't say that," the young man corrected. "The concept of God is not required."

"If accident is the cause of the universe, it seems logical to me to declare that you make a God of chance."

"Chance is the method, but not the purpose that permeates the whole creation," the young man said.

"Be that as it may," the metaphysician declared. "However, let me ask you whether you have any rights, civil or otherwise?

"Of course I have rights," the young man asserted. "The Constitution specifically states that I am entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Let's probe a little deeper and follow your basic assumptions," the metaphysician suggested. "According to the science of biology, you are simply a superior animal, no better and no worse than a beast in the jungle. You are simply a little accident that happened in the vast universe, of no more consequence than an ant or a dog. Your so-called rights are simply moralities that you have devised for self-protection. What rights does any animal have? You may visit a slaughter house and find out."

"You're confusing the issue," cried the young man. "I never drew any of these conclusions."

"They flow from your denial of a directive purpose in the universe," the metaphysician pointed out. "If all is accident, all laws become man-made conventions. For example, if someone — himself an accident — kills you — another accident — what wrong has been done?"

"You are distorting what I believe," the young man cried.

"If man is a meaningless bit of flotsam and jetsam spewed up by accident, then there can be no tragedy in what befalls him. Everything is then per-

mitted, and regardless of what happens, no one can justly complain."

"What about the laws that guarantee my rights?" the young man demanded.

"If lions made the law, they would favor lions; and if wolves made it, they would favor wolves. Men naturally favor themselves. Your rights disappear as soon as you make man a puppet of circumstance."

"All right," the young man said, "if that's the conclusion you draw from my assumption, I'll modify my position."

"In what way?" the metaphysician wished to know.

"I'll call myself an agnostic."

"That's a step forward," the metaphysician conceded.

40. VISION OF ART

At an exhibition of his paintings, an artist spoke about his craft.

"The universe is a work of art," he asserted, "and every painter is but an apprentice of the Great Creator who colors the dawn and sunset.

"Every painting is an illusion, for it is an attempt to represent in two dimensions what manifests in three.

"Every part of a painting is related to every other part, for the artist is concerned with the whole.

"A picture needs both vertical and horizontal elements, for they symbolize aspiration upward and creative relationships towards others, outwardly expressed. The Chinese call these contrasting elements yang and yin.

"Shadow and light establish the values of a painting.

"The purpose of the artist may be summed up in the word *beauty.*"

At this point, one of the artist's listeners posed a question. "What are the metaphysical implications of your observations?"

"The life of every human being," the artist replied, "is a picture that takes shape progressively from birth to death. Man works in the field of illusion, for time is but a faint reflection of eternity. Each person is related to every other person on the face of the earth — in fact, to everything manifest and unmanifest. The striving of every man is twofold — upwards, in aspiration to the highest, and outwards, in service to his fellow men. Shadow and light are essential ingredients in human existence, that is, fortune and misfortune. A life, like a picture, must be seen as a whole. The direction in which life tends is beauty — not only beauty apprehended, but, even more, beauty of a higher order than any man has ever conjectured."

41. MAN, THE SYMBOL

"For ages and ages man has walked upon the face of the globe," said a

symbolist to an assemblage of business men, "yet in all that time he has never realized that he is himself one of the most important symbols ever evolved on earth."

"Would you explain more fully what you have in mind?" a business man asked. "I confess that I myself am unsure of the symbolism that's suggested by a man walking on the face of the earth."

"Under his feet lies the earth, toward which he is gravitationally drawn. Far in the distance are the stars. He stands between the earth and the gleaming lamps of space. Two opposing forces pull him in contrary directions. The earth draws him downward while the stars encourage him to aspire upward. His condition demands that a choice be made. He can succumb to the tug of earth and move downward to the status of a beast — or he can yield to the attractive pull of the stars."

"I can understand the movement downward," business man interrupted, "but the striving toward the stars seems rather fanciful and vague."

"A mountain," the symbolist answered, "moves upward from the solid substantial earth to the distant clouds — and the goat that travels up and down its craggy slopes indicates that the task of scaling it is achievable."

"Can you explain your meaning in terms of human beings instead of mountain goats?"

"Man ascends or descends in thought," the symbolist explained. "The poet's vision and the scientist's dream are elevating influences. The entire drama is enacted in the realm of consciousness. In thought man rises, and in thought he falls."

"Your theory is fine," the business man conceded, "but I must confess that I'd have trouble lighting my hearth-fire from the stars."

"That may be," replied the symbolist, "but if you set your time by the stars, why can't you decide to emit light as they do?"

42. TRUTH

I am the Truth — the Truth that men cherish in theory, but from which they often flee in practice.

Actually, I am a friend, but down the ages human beings, speaking generally, have regarded me as a foe. Now and then a brave soul takes up the cudgels in my behalf, but only too often he is derided and mocked for his adherence to my cause.

Stern and uncompromising is my nature. I concede nothing to flattery, equivocation, palliation, and compromise. Nor am I concerned that I have so few followers among the sons of men. Oftentimes I stand alone, deserted by everyone, but these defections in no wise disturb my equanimity.

Each generation professes to worship at my altar, but I am greater and more inclusive than any doctrine ever expounded by men. All their books contain but a fraction of what I truly am.

I care not for status, rank, or title. The rich and the poor, the high and the low — all are offered the jewels of which I am the custodian.

Great souls have laid down their lives in order that I might not be ostracized. They have lit a lamp that time cannot extinguish.

To those who seek to travel the path that I reveal, I offer no pleasurable rewards. The path I indicate is filled with boulders, quagmires, and bramble bushes. Many who start out bravely turn back because the venture is too arduous. And yet, those who have dared to march on, regardless of the cost, are the lightbearers who have blazed new paths for all the sons of men.

43. SUPPLY AND DEMAND

An economist gave a lecture on the operation of the law of supply and demand in the market place. At the end, he asked for questions.

"Why are there so many liquor stores in all our major cities?" a student of philosophy wanted to know.

"Supply, as I explained in my talk," the economist said, "is directly related to demand. People demand alcoholic beverages, and thereby call forth those who will supply them."

"Why don't people demand peace, goodwill to all men, and spiritual progress?" the student asked.

"You are going beyond the bounds of economics," the economist said. "However, you raise an issue that surely ought to be explored further. Theoretically, if people could be taught to demand higher values, they would soon be in evidence."

"Pursuing your theory further," the student declared, "the whole of education ought to be geared to the development of constructive demands that will be socially beneficial and spiritually wise."

"You have a point," the economist conceded. "Justice, truth, peace, and culture ought to be demanded more vigorously, for that would call forth the needed supply."

"Might there not be a science or art of creative demanding that would improve the condition of man?" the student suggested.

"Advertising often undertakes to create new needs," the economist pointed out.

"True," the student answered, "but the resulting demand is usually for more material things."

"Therein we see the materialistic bent of the age," the economist observed. "However, who is prepared to set forth spiritual demands that would better serve the whole human race? Truth, justice, and right human relations are ideals, but the supply is short because the demand is too inchoate and imprecise."

"The greatest need," the student ventured, "is for more light so that man might conform to the pattern of the universal purpose."

"If the demand for more light were sufficiently strong," the economist said, "I think it would evoke the supply."

"I believe," said the student, "that all people should demand the light that adds meaning to human existence and the opportunity to cooperate with life in the fulfillment of its purposes."

"It may be so," the economist replied. "All you have to do now is to persuade people to make such demands."

44. PURPOSE

A philosopher and his disciple were walking through a bazaar, discoursing on lofty subjects as they went.

"According to your theories, how did the worlds of space come into being?" the disciple asked.

At this point, the philosopher caught sight of a potter shaping a vase. The latter was busily engaged in turning a wheel and molding a chunk of clay.

"Observe the potter," the philosopher admonished.

"What has the potter to do with my question?" the disciple wished to know.

"Is he not creating something?"

"Well, yes," the disciple reluctantly agreed, "but I was talking about the vast worlds of space. He is simply fashioning a vase."

"What are the three elements necessary for his work?" asked the philosopher.

"He needs clay to work with, and a wheel to shape it," the disciple replied.

"I am inclined to phrase the matter differently," the philosopher corrected. "He starts with a purpose; he develops a method; and he creates a form. His purpose is to make a vase. The means he employs is a wheel. The material that he shapes is the unformed clay."

"I begin to see your point," the disciple nodded. "In the creation of the worlds, there is first a purpose; second, a method or plan for achieving it; and finally, the raw material that is to be molded and shaped."

"You are making progress," the philosopher smiled. "Elaborate the theme further."

"A scribe has an idea, uses pen and ink, and confides his thought to blank paper. A poet starts with a sentiment or concept, uses rhythmic language, and shapes a poem."

"If this is true in the microcosm," the philosopher observed, "why shouldn't it also be true in the macrocosm?"

"But human beings seem completely unaware of the purpose for which they were created," the disciple commented.

"You have stated one of the greatest goals in life," the philosopher declared. "The purpose of every man should be the discovery of the Great

Creator's purpose. A vase, quite obviously, doesn't know why it was made. Man, however, may be defined as a being in search of the purpose that evolved him."

45. WASTE

A young man had inherited a large fortune, but in a short period of time it evaporated. The money seemed to run through his fingers like water. One day he awoke and found himself destitute. Depressed and sobered, he went to a psychologist for counsel.

For a long time the psychologist listened in silence. Finally he asked, "What have you wasted?"

"Wasted?" the young man queried. "Why, I've wasted money, of course,"

"True," the psychologist agreed, "but what else?"

The young man's brow wrinkled. After a pause, he added, "I've also wasted time."

"Think again," the psychologist advised.

The young man pondered for a while and then said, "I've wasted the gift of life."

"These realizations are all germane," the psychologist assented. "There is, however, another area of awareness that you have neglected to consider. Can you tell me what it is?"

The young man thought and thought, but nothing else suggested itself to him. "Can you give me a clue?" he asked.

"Your realizations have all been concerned with yourself — your squandering of money, your loss of time, your waste of the gift of life."

"You mean that I should also be aware of what other persons have lost because of my folly?" the young man interrupted.

"No man lives to himself," the psychologist pointed out. "This is an interrelated universe. In the achievement of every man, we are augmented; and in the failure of every man, diminished."

"I begin to see," the young man declared, "that my foolish acts are not simply personal, but affect the whole of humanity."

"It is clear that you are suffering for your ill-considered misuse of your legacy, but you might also consider the wrong you have done to the rest of the human race, each member of which is bound to you by the indissoluble thread of brotherhood."

"It seems to me," the young man said quietly, "that I must better myself not simply for my own benefit, but to pay a debt I have incurred to humanity."

The psychologist nodded.

46. BOREDOM AND MIRACLES

A punctilious office clerk whose work was very routine became afflicted with boredom. He was exceedingly punctual and performed his duties with methodical precision.

"Every day," he would complain, "is a copy of the last one. I get up out of the same bed, shuffle the same papers in the office, come home at the same time, smoke the same pipe, and retire at the same hour. The years pass, and I don't get any younger."

The clerk grew more nervous and irritable — so much so, that his fellow office workers became concerned. It was finally decided that he should be encouraged to invite a certain scholar to his home — a scholar who was known for his pleasant disposition and vivid imagination.

Over a cup of tea, the scholar brought up the problem of boredom.

"They tell me," he observed, "that you find life boring."

"I certainly do," the clerk confessed. "The whole experience of living I find an exercise in boredom. Don't you find it so?"

"My experience is somewhat different," the scholar said diplomatically. "I find myself uplifted by contemplating the miracles and wonders of life."

"Miracles and wonders!" exclaimed the clerk. "I fail to see them — and science clearly proves that they do not exist."

"It always seems a miracle to me that the food I eat is converted into flesh, bone, and energy," the scholar observed.

"I never thought of that," the clerk acknowledged.

"Every day untold numbers of people die, yet the human caravan moves on through the centuries," the scholar remarked. "I find this an intriguing mystery. Sometimes I wonder what it all means."

"I simply never think about it," the clerk confessed, "but I must admit that your point is well taken."

"Our own destinies are also wonder-inspiring," the scholar continued. "Only yesterday we were not present on earth; and tomorrow we shall depart into the unknown from which we came."

"We're surrounded by mystery," the clerk nodded.

"Sometimes I feel that the whole world — flowers, stars, mountains, and rivers — speaks to us."

"You do!" exclaimed the clerk. "What do they say?"

"They're all symbols," the scholar explained. "The stars tell me to shine; the mountains, to aspire; the rivers to find the ocean of being; and the flowers, to create beauty."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated the clerk.

The next day something strange happened. The clerk was late for work — a most unusual development, but his disposition improved.

47. TIME

I am Time — and in my threefold nature, I preside over the destinies of all earthly things. When man first bestrode the earth, I was there as a witness — and I have followed him on his lengthy pilgrimage through untold aeons. I have seen generation after generation come upon the world stage and eventually disappear.

Mighty empires I have reduced to dust and ashes. Inexorably onward I move, and naught can make me halt, even for a moment. Men and nations are subject to my command, for I rule the evolutionary flow toward a destiny beyond the ken of prophet or poet. Whether human beings acknowledge me or not, they must perforce obey my stern decrees.

Although I am unitary, I have three sons who preside respectively over the past, the present, and the future. I shall call them forth so that they may define the scope of their ministrations.

"I, the Spirit of the Past, am the universal instructor of mankind. Regard me carefully, for I present to you the successes of others, which you may emulate, and the failures, from which you may profit. The annals of history are textbooks that could teach you wisdom. Rigid and unchangeable I am, a faithful recorder of what has been. Only in the sphere of my brother, the present moment, may my teachings be applied."

"I, the Spirit of the Present, am but a thin wedge between the past and the future, yet I am of paramount importance. The past cannot be changed by one iota, while the future forever lies beyond the horizon. Only in this present moment may man act. This is the place where they can apply the wisdom gained from the past and develop a creative vision of the future. In this narrow and circumscribed *now* they must work out their destiny."

"I, the Spirit of the Future, offer the gift of opportunity — opportunity to amend the past and to work out envisioned ideals. I am unformed and unshaped, waiting for men to use me wisely so that they may move toward the high spiritual destiny that is their birthright. Every age lights new lamps on my altars. Some day, depending on human aspiration, men may move onward carrying a banner bearing the inscription, 'The Glory of the One.'"

You have heard the words of my three sons, the Past, the Present, and the Future. Yet, behind me stands a shrouded figure to whom all of us bow in deference and for whom we weave our variegated tapestry. I refer to the Spirit of Eternity.

48. SPACE

I am subtle, imponderable, and omnipresent, for I am Space, the matrix of the whole creation. Without me, neither solar systems, stars, nor constellations would exist. I provide the universal framework that enables my brother, Time, to function.

Vaster am I than all the stars and constellations that evolve within my precincts. The mind of man cannot fathom where I begin or where I end.

I am, in a sense, nothing — and everything. They seek to measure me in light years, but I am better comprehended by lighted thoughts. Invisible myself, I make it possible for all visible things to appear. Men seldom pause to consider that their existence is a gift from me, but I demand no recognition — nor do I often receive it.

Universality is my keynote. Whatever exists anywhere in the cosmos exists in me. My philanthropy is subtly hidden. I make possible the evolution of man, of suns, of stars, but receive nothing in return.

Each human being, from the moment of birth, occupies space and therefore lies in my domain. Although I am wholly impersonal, I appreciate the discernment of those, however few, who acknowledge the gift. Somehow, the right to occupy space has seldom been discussed in the history of mankind.

I am a witness of all that occurs in the cosmos. In regard to earth, this all-seeing faculty is a source of great perturbation. I never cease to wonder at the unwise manner in which men use the great gift I freely bestow upon them.

And yet, I am but the shadow of a more awe-ful being, so august and dazzling that the sons of men cannot comprehend his mission and his majesty. I refer to the Spirit of Infinity.

49. FATE

For countless ages I sit at the Loom of Time and weave an intricate tapestry, for I am what men call Fate. The weaving, however, is not arbitrary and capricious, but prescribed by the foundational laws of the universe. Out of the desires, thoughts, and aspirations of men I weave the pattern of what is to be. I am strictly limited by the nature of the threads placed at my disposal. Those who complain of the portion allotted to them should realize that they themselves have provided me with the subtle filaments that I must use. They can readily change the pattern of my weaving by their aspirations and actions.

The purpose of my work is the creation of the Perfect Pattern designed by those great beings whose eyes are fixed on the Robe of Glory that lies in the higher vision of potentiality. Too few, as yet, are fit to wear it, and therefore rebel against my just apportionments.

To those who find the garment I give them too restrictive and troublesome, I plead, "Give me the golden and silver threads, with which I can weave a more resplendent garment for your wearing. Your present raiment results from the strands you designed for me in the past. What you wear tomorrow will depend on the spinning you do today."

Nations as well as individuals are in my charge. Only that which they give me may I use in weaving the garment they will wear in the future.

Pleading and placation are of no avail. Fain would I add a golden thread to a hempen garment, but I may not do so unless such strands are placed in my

hands. Men provide me with the materials that I must use in my weaving. Herein lies choice. I am but the weaver who works with the presented skein.

Some few among the sons of men have woven for themselves the Robe of Glory. On these my special blessing rests.

50. REFORMATION

A minister spoke about reformation to a convict.

"It's no use," said the convict, shaking his head. "You're wasting your breath. I'm a hopeless case."

"How do you know that your judgment of yourself is justified?" the minister questioned.

"Nothing can help me," the convict declared, "nothing. I know myself too well to expect a miraculous transformation."

"Let's not talk about miracles," said the minister, "but about the common things. When iron is taught to sing, it becomes a church bell. If iron can be made musical, why can't a human being create harmony?"

"That seems to be an exception," the convict countered.

"A flutist transforms ordinary breath into stirring melodies," replied the minister.

"You seem to have a point there," the convict admitted.

"Who can tell what's hidden in a tiny seed?" asked the minister. "An oak tree sleeps in an acorn, and a marigold in a little dot of substance."

"Perhaps I spoke too hastily," the convict said. "Iron, breath, and seeds provide examples I can't dispute."

51. INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC

The old violin-maker worked contentedly in his shop all day, creating instruments that were known for their rich, mellow tone. At first he did everything himself, but when he could no longer cope with the orders that poured in, he decided to hire help.

A young student of metaphysics was chosen to assist him. All went well, and the novice learned quickly.

However, one day the old violin-maker, as he entered the shop, noticed that his assistant was standing idle, apparently lost in thought.

"Why aren't you at work?" the old man asked.

"A thought struck me," the young man responded. "We are fashioning violins so that men may draw enchanting music from them."

"I knew that when I first started this business," the old man said dryly.

"But don't you see?" the young man cried. "Man himself is an instrument that was created to give forth music."

"I wish more people would realize it," the old man muttered.

"Men are symbols," cried the young man, "creators of forms that have the potentiality, if rightly played, to give forth ravishing sounds. In the hands of an artist, beauty could take shape from the vibrating strings of everyday life."

"I haven't come across such artists," the old man observed.

"Man is also a musical instrument," the assistant went on, ignoring the other's comment, "but too many people play it improperly. When the strings are out of tune, there is nothing but discord. If only a small proportion of the human race succeed in playing a violin, fewer still learn to play the more intricate instrument that they themselves actually are. Just as a fiddle needs an artist to call forth its potential music, so the human being needs a spiritual master to express his wondrous possibilities."

"This is a business," the old violin-maker said abruptly, "and if you philosophize when you should be working, you'll ruin it."

52. MOON MYSTERY

Late at night I sat in my chamber with the lights off and the window shade up. The moon was at the full, and its silver beams wrought a strange tapestry on the floor of the room. I sat in my chair and pondered the scene before me. In such an atmosphere, the distinction between fantasy and reality easily becomes blurred.

Of a sudden it seemed to me that I heard a small voice with a silvery tinkle that sounded softly in my ear. I looked about to discover the source and finally concluded that the moon was projecting sound along the line of light described by one of its beams.

"For untold centuries I've been forced to orbit the earth," the moon complained, "watching the often ridiculous antics of its inhabitants."

"That's certainly harsh punishment," I agreed. "You must have committed great wrong to deserve such a fate."

"It is true," the moon acquiesced. "Once, long ago, I was a planet and gave forth a light of my own, but I was proud and wished to shine more brightly than the sun. Thus I upset the equilibrium of the solar system."

"We've got quite a few rebellious ones on earth, too," I commiserated.

"For my pride I was punished," the moon went on. "Since that time I am condemned to reflect light and can generate none of my own. Moreover, I am in the firm grip of Time and must wax and wane in cyclic rhythms."

"You must feel very frustrated," I exclaimed.

"Oh, I do," the moon agreed. "At times I feel so low that I go into an eclipse and refuse to reflect any light at all."

"Do you have a special message for the sons of earth who move so restlessly, and often purposelessly, on its surface?"

At this point a cloud passed over the face of the moon and interfered with

my reception. A moment later, however, the conversation resumed.

"I sought to be a law unto myself," the moon declared, "and now look at me."

"You are certainly in a sorry predicament," I commented.

"Men should rebel against themselves," the moon advised, "rather than against the patterns prescribed by universal law."

A heavy cloud suddenly shrouded the moon and ended the dialogue.

53. MINISTRY OF DEATH

I am that much-dreaded figure, Death. My approach calls forth lamentation and wailing, but that does not deter me from my appointed task. I do not pause to argue, persuade, or explain, for I have no time for such paltering. I carry out the law, and there is no court of appeals to overturn my verdict.

Atheists deny the existence of God, but few disaffirm my ministry, even though I am a manifestation of that God. I cooperate with my brother, Life, but my methods differ radically from his. He is patient, tolerant, and merciful, while I am exacting, unsentimental, and just. I have often told him that he is too permissive, but he tends to disregard my advice. Life brings people together and offers them the opportunities bestowed by experience, whereas I take them apart, separating the earthly from the essential. Very often, I find, those who disregard the admonitions of Life are exceedingly attentive to every word I utter.

In vain do people try to avoid me. Though they flee to the ends of the earth, I shall find them. They can be assured, however, that I play no favorites. Kings, peasants, rich or poor — I treat all alike. So it has been for untold centuries, and so it will continue to be.

My ministry has long been misunderstood. If one day does not end, another cannot begin. Sunrise and sunset, symbolizing the beginning and the end, are equally beautiful and equally necessary. I preside over the end — or what men believe to be the end — for sunset is everlastingly linked with sunrise. The day reveals the sun, and the night, the stars.

The qualities that a man builds into his nature during a lifetime of experience, I abstract. I prize the essence, not the form — a philosophy that many men find difficult to accept.

I provide manifest proof of cosmic purpose, for I symbolize the relinquishment of that which is imperfect in the interests of perfection, the destruction of the chariot in the interests of the charioteer, the ending of present limitations in the interests of future glory.

Regard me as a foe, and you learn nothing; but look upon me as a friend, though my mien be severe and stern, and you will discover that I bear gifts of rare beauty for the aspiring soul.

54. VIVISECTION

The inspector for the Humane Society visited the laboratories where animals were subjected to a variety of experiments in the interests of science. He was met by the medical doctor in charge and informed of the work in progress.

"You understand, of course, that our purpose is the alleviation of suffering in human beings," the doctor declared. "All that you witness in our laboratories must be seen from this perspective; otherwise, you may receive the wrong impression."

"I quite understand," the inspector replied. "Just tell me what you are doing, and I'll form my own conclusions."

The doctor took him to certain parts of the laboratory where various animals — mostly monkeys, dogs, and cats — were housed in small cages.

"In these cells," he said, pointing to a group of woebegone cats, "we have housed cats whom we are depriving of water to see how long they can survive."

"Of what use will this knowledge be?" the inspector asked.

"Science gathers facts," the doctor said loftily. "The use to which these facts will be put is a different matter. Some day human lives may be saved because we have amassed the relevant factual data."

"I'll reserve judgment on that subject," the inspector said. "Now what are you doing with these miserable-looking monkeys? They seem to be diseased."

"Oh, they are," the doctor agreed. "We take only fine, healthy specimens, and we inoculate them with foul diseases. Eventually we derive valuable serums for public use from them."

"Isn't it cruel to treat them in this fashion?"

"Not at all," the doctor explained. "Countless human beings benefit from our service. It is true that the monkey becomes diseased, but let us always remember that we are sacrificing an animal in order to help a human being. And aren't human beings more important than monkeys?"

"I'm not sure the infected monkeys share the same point of view," the inspector observed. "Now what kind of experiment are you conducting on the dogs in yonder cages?"

"A plastic surgeon is doing special work with them," the doctor confided. "He cuts off their legs, for example, and inserts artificial contrivances in order to determine what will be most helpful to human beings. He's certainly doing great work."

"Are you saying that he cuts off the limbs of these dogs in the name of humanity?"

"You always seem to emphasize the harm done to the animal," the doctor complained, "totally disregarding the benefits that accrue to human beings."

"Evolution tells us that man is also an animal," the inspector declared. "Wouldn't this theory suggest that human beings are distant brothers to the beasts you mutilate?"

"Your thinking, if I may so," the doctor said with asperity, "is distinctly unscientific and utopian."

The argument became heated, and the inspector soon left, muttering as he did, the one word, *slaughterhouse.*

55. CHOICE

I am the arbiter of every man's destiny, for I am the power manifest in choice. None can escape my pervasive influence. The great and the humble, the successful and the failures, the dreamer and the materialist — all come under my rule.

The gift I offer is the right to shape the course of individual destiny by choosing — choosing to live wisely or ignobly, to squander the golden grains of life or to fashion them into a crown. I permit the sons of men to climb the mountain of truth or to grope in the fog and mist of ignorance. Some move heavenward toward the light while others merge into the dark shadows of bondage.

No one can evade me, for I accompany the sons of earth from the moment of birth to the very instant of their passing. To refuse to choose is also a choice. In the very nature of things each human being must decide which words he will utter and which he will leave unsaid, which thoughts to affirm and which to deny. Althugh circumstances may be thrust upon him, his response lies wholly within his discretion.

I evaluate all lives in terms of the fabric of choices that have been woven by act and deed and thought. Herein lies equality, for outer circumstances are wholly subordinate to inner responses.

To those who ask me the meaning of life, I say, "It lies in the opportunity to choose — to choose to follow a star or to wander aimlessly in a desert. On the hinge of choice turns the destiny of men, nations, and civilizaions."

Men know not the momentous issues they decide in their journey through life. In the gray atmosphere of daily living, the implications of preferences and antipathies are unclear. Gods and demons are simply the end product of a long series of apparently inconsequential choices.

56. WISDOM OF THE SERPENT

On a summer's day I wandered in the forest, following the course of a purling stream, and, becoming tired, lay down to rest under a tree. The lazy atmosphere made me drowsy, and in a short time I fell asleep. A slight, hissing noise awakened me. Stretched on a log in the stream was a copperhead snake. Its beady eyes were fixed unswervingly upon me.

I had always wondered about the Biblical admonition to be "as wise as

serpents."

Wherein, I would ask myself, lay the wisdom of such creatures and how can we be expected to emulate them?

The copperhead snake apparently read my thoughts, for it gave forth a few sibilant hisses that registered on my ears as words.

"I'm as low as the dust at your feet and quite content to live in an unpretentious hole. The treasure of life I guard with my venomous fangs."

I was surprised that the serpent could speak, but then remembered mythological stories in which serpents were able to make themselves understood.

"Why do you inspire such great fear?" I questioned.

"Respect," he said, "is a more appropriate word. I bother no one, but I do defend myself on occasion."

"You also seem to prefer secrecy," I observed.

"I dislike being in the limelight," the serpent admitted, "so I hide."

"That's a good way to stay out of trouble," I commented. "I wish more people would realize the value of this technique. But aren't you particularly vulnerable when you moult?"

"When the coat of skin I'm wearing becomes too constrictive," the serpent declared, "I get rid of it. When the form is no longer adequate for the expanding life, I create a new garment."

"Many people hold on to outlived forms," I reflected. "That tendency has caused much trouble in the world."

"You will also note my unique form of locomotion," the serpent said. "I move sinuously from side to side when I go forward."

"Yes," I assented, "you see both sides of every issue. "Moreover, the sinuous curve you describe is regarded by artists as exceptionally beautiful. The curvature of the human spine could have been traced there by someone like you."

"That may be," the serpent agreed, "but my primordial form of motion was even better."

"What was that?" I asked curiously.

"When I find the end of my tail, I become a circle," the serpent explained, "and then I can stand upright and move with the swiftness of a wheel."

"I believe that's a description of a serpent of wisdom," I said, remembering some mystical writings I had read.

"That could be," he said as he disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

57. THE GIFT OF SILENCE

Underlying all sound is the subtle silence that I personify. The sons of earth, caught up in the turmoil and agitation of daily living, scarcely sense my healing and beneficent presence. The static they generate builds a wall that

shuts me out; and yet, I am always available, always unfoldingly present.

At birth, man emerges from the great silence; at death, he returns to it; and in between, he beats a clamorous drum.

I am the source from which sound originates, the inner essence of serenity from which springs all that is outwardly manifest. As numbers arise from zero, so does noise become objectified through me.

My silence is a healing balm for the troubled soul. It unravels the knots of anxiety and care that men are prone to tie. It calms the fretful mind that jumps unceasingly from one thought to another.

In the interstellar spaces, I sing, and on lonely mountain tops, I brood. Often I watch over slumberers and abide for a time in fields where fragrant flowers grow.

As the radiant sun pours light upon the world, so do I send streams of gentle silence. The light is visible, but the silence is perceptible only to the searching and discerning heart. I nourish the world, but few understand my ministry.

Even wisdom requires the admixture of the golden grains of silence with the silver grains of speech.

My quietness is an essential energy available to man, but seldom used. He has learned to make noise, but can he now learn the art of making silence?

A great part of men's lives is spent in listening. They listen to the varied accents of speech, the rhythmic tones of music, the manifold sounds of nature, but who listens to the all-pervading silence? Sages, being wise, seek and prize it.

I am within the grasp of every man, responsive to every call at any time and in any place, but I remain a stranger to all who do not choose to attune themselves to my healing keynote. However, as life approaches its end, men turn to me for comfort — and never in vain.

58. MOTIVATIONAL ETHICS

A theological student cheated on an examination and was caught in the act. He was brought before a professor and asked why he had acted so unethically.

"Since the beginning of time, poets have written about mythical monsters, non-existent castles, impossible adventures, and gilded dreams," the theological student declared. "In plain terms, they wrote lies. Politicians, like poets, have also promised what they never fulfilled. Again, they were liars. These men are honored, while I, who have done nothing so drastic, but simply cheated on an examination, am treated like a criminal."

"To commit a wrong is one offense," the professor responded, "but to justify it is two."

"I'm simply reasoning in the way I was taught in a class on situational ethics," the student said defensively. "Ethical evaluations are dependent on

the context of a situation, not on absolute values."

The professor pondered a moment. "The motive transcends the situation. A man who lies to a would-be assassin to save the life of a friend differs from one who tells falsehoods to a customs inspector. Motivational ethics should concern us more than situational relativity."

"If I had to examine my motives every time I acted," the student replied, "I'd have to develop an entirely new mechanism of response."

"That is so," the professor agreed.

59. ROSES AND TRANSMUTATION

A businessman who was easily upset by trifles sought the advice of a psychologist.

"Whenever you find that you are becoming overwrought," the psychologist advised, "go into your garden and contemplate the flowers. Subject yourself to their influence and see what happens. Keep a journal of your realizations."

The businessman followed this advice. Whenever he became disturbed, he retired to a sequestered spot in his garden where rose bushes were much in evidence. A page from his journal, selected at random, concerns a realization that came to him as a result of this practice.

Journal Entry: In listening to a newscast, I learned that the stock market had experienced a sharp reversal, and that the value of my holdings had perceptibly declined. This meant that I had lost a considerable sum of money. I frowned, bit a fingernail, and tapped nervously with my foot. Suddenly I remembered the advice I had been given and retired to my favorite nook in the garden.

I sat there for a time, trying to calm my agitated mind. The sun was westering and a soft stillness hung in the air. The rose bushes scented the atmosphere with a choice perfume. Some roses were in bud, but others were fully unfolded. I wondered whether human beings might not be compared to these flowers. The rose of aspiration might be a bud on one while the rose of compassion expanded its petals in delicate beauty on another.

Then I remembered how I had distributed foul-smelling manure at the base of the rose bush at the beginning of the season. Now the fetid odor was gone. The rose bush, I speculated, had transmuted it into fragrance — a miracle of nature. Out of mud and manure it had created delicate flowers that diffused sweetness on its surroundings. Could human beings achieve a similar miracle and learn to create beauty out of the muck and grime of daily living?

I returned to the house with a lightened heart.

60. PHILANTHROPY OF BREATH

Addressing a class of students, a teacher of metaphysics asked, "In which specific ways can a man demonstrate a philanthropic spirit?"

"I know a person," said one student, "whose will contains a statement that his dead body will be given to science so that his remains may be of some benefit to the human race."

"A friend of mine," another student declared, "periodically donates quantities of his blood so that it may be of use to those who require transfusions."

A third student expressed a different view. "Everyone can be a philanthropist," he asserted, "by donating his breath to the world."

"Would you mind explaining further what you mean?" the teacher questioned.

"Every man draws his breath momently and hourly from the great reservoir of air," the student rejoined. "What does he give forth as a consequence of what he has received? What he transmits are words and spent breath. If a man's words have the fragrance of wisdom and his expired breath is suffused with a blessing, he is a philanthropist whatever his condition may be."

A moment of silence followed this expression, and then the teacher said, "This is truly metaphysical philanthropy."

61. PEGASUS

Mythology tells us that the winged horse called Pegasus was bridled and tamed by Bellerophon, a Greek hero who engaged in many dangerous exploits. In the end, however, he sought to ride his famous charger to the sacrosanct heights of Olympus and so force his way into the company of the gods. Displeased by such pride, Jupiter sent a gadfly that stung Pegasus with such intensity that the horse unseated Bellerophon in mid-course, casting him headlong downward to earth.

What happened thereafter to Pegasus, the mighty horse that had learned how to fly?

The special qualities of the steed were not readily apparent. He looked much the same as other horses. When his wings were folded, they seemed to disappear into the skin.

Generally speaking, horses are prized for their swiftness and for their working capacity. It was soon discovered that Pegasus was not a racehorse, so he was sold to a farmer who used him to draw the plough across the fields. Years passed, and the flying steed that could soar through the sky became indistinguishable from the beasts of burden that draw carts in the workaday world.

One day a poet chanced to see Pegasus in a pasture. He immediately sensed that this was no ordinary horse. How he ever managed to bridle the steed will

never be known, for he never spoke about the matter.

The farmer, believing Pegasus to be a very indifferent draft horse, was quite willing to sell the animal. As soon as the sale was completed, the poet mounted the horse, whose wings suddenly unfolded. In another moment, both majestically ascended into the sky to the amazement of all who saw the event.

The farmer was angry, for he felt that he had been cheated. "Had I known that the horse can fly," he cried, "I'd have charged him five times the price I received." He was consoled by his wife, however, who remarked, "What use could you possibly have for a flying horse? Be glad he didn't decide to disappear into the sky one fine day. Then you'd have nothing."

Legend has it that the poet never returned, but journeyed far in space until he found a place in the distant heavens where he can still be seen by stargazers as a constellation known as Pegasus.

62. THE GREAT HARMONIST

After finishing the daily newspaper one evening, I settled back in my chair and sighed. The news had been filled with reports of murders, kidnapping, wanton violence, and senseless terrorism. The human race, I reflected, had still a long way to go before it could envision a nobler destiny. As I pondered, I fell into a reverie.

Of a sudden, I seemed to be looking down at the earth from a great height. Beside me was a venerable old gentleman who appeared to be composing music. I asked him to explain what he was doing.

"Many dissonant sounds arise from the earth," he declared.

"I should think so," I concurred.

"Out of these sounds I compose a musical composition," he explained. "As a harmonist, it is my task to refashion the innumerable tones sounded forth by the human race into a song that reflects the contribution of all!"

"You must have a hard time resolving into harmony the dissonance that continually arises from the race of men," I commented.

"I make use of all sounds, whether dissonant or consonant," he elaborated. "All tones are woven into a single pattern, but I must admit that some harmonies are more inspiring than others."

"If only people knew that the sounds they daily emit contribute to the pattern of the symphony you create, wouldn't they be more apt to supply you with uplifting material?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Few would believe it. The sounds that men give forth are not audible to the human ear."

"Ah, but one day the race of men will harmonize with the divine melody that sounds in the singing silences," I ventured to suggest.

"That day is as yet a far-off event," he sighed.

"It needn't be," I cried, "if. . ." and suddenly I found myself in my customary chair, staring at the newspaper headlines.

63. SPIRITUAL UNEMPLOYMENT

In the lounge of a club for professional men, several members discussed some of the problems of modern living.

"What should concern us most is unemployment," declared an economist. "When workers are laid off, the gross national product declines, and the wheels of industry move at a slower rate."

A clergyman expressed a different view. "I'm more concerned with spiritual employment, or unemployment. Too many people are idle in matters pertaining to the spirit. The gross national product is far less important to me than the subtle national product. It is possible to be economically affluent and spiritually impoverished — a condition that is all too common today."

"If people are not economically secure," the economist replied, "how can you expect them to be spiritually oriented?"

"If people are not spiritually oreinted," the clergyman rejoined, "does their economic security have any meaning?"

"You speak of imponderables that can't be measured," said the economist. "In fact, I never heard of the subtle national product."

"You speak of effects without relating them to the causes from which they flow," the clergyman argued.

"I still say that a healthy economy is the source of national prosperity."

"While I maintain that neither material wealth nor its absence produces spiritual prosperity."

"How could anyone ever calculate the degree of spiritual unemployment?" the economist questioned.

"Add up the man-hours spent on trivialities, follies, self-aggrandizement, and immoral behavior," the clergyman countered, "and you will have a measure of man's waste of spiritual resources."

"What you propose would cause a revolution in economic thinking," the economist remarked. "In fact, it would require a major revaluation of values."

"Just so," responded the clergyman.

64. THE HIGHER MUSIC

Before an assemblage of people, a flutist displayed his skill. Pouring his breath into the flute and dexterously moving his fingers, he produced sweet and lilting music. The audience listened attentively and appreciatively. It was evident that the music cast a spell, raising the consciousness of the listeners to a plane where harmony prevailed over discord.

When he finished, the audience gave him an ovation. However, an elderly man who had been sitting on the sidelines never once applauded the skillful performance. The flutist noticed this omission and accosted the old gentleman.

"Did you enjoy my playing?" the flutist asked.

"Yes," responded the elderly gentleman, "but are you aware of the symbolism of what you did?"

"Symbolism?" queried the flutist. "I'm not sure I understand you."

"You have used an instrument of material substance to create inspiring music."

"True," responded the flutist, "but what of it?"

"You yourself are an instrument in the hands of the soul that purposes to create music of a different kind in accordance with the pattern of your life."

"But I play by the notes set before me," said the flutist, "and the force I use is the breath."

"The days are the measures of the higher music," the old man explained, "and ideas are the notes. The invisible spirit corresponds to the air. Thus is it possible to make matter sing."

"Are you saying that I myself could be an instrument on which the soul could play a subtler music that is beyond the capacity of my flute?"

"You have understood alright," the old man said. "You have gained skill in producing the lower kind of music. When will you achieve equal competence in playing the higher?"

65. RETIREMENT OPPORTUNITIES

An elderly man shuffled with slow and faltering steps into the office of a counselor and wearily sat down in an old chair.

"I'm all at sea," the old man said. "After working diligently for more than forty years as a clerk, I find myself forced to retire from all active work. Time has robbed me of my youth so that my very bones seem to creak when I walk. My friends have disappeared, some having succumbed to the sickle of death while others have retired to distant places. What kind of predicament is this for a man who has lived an upright life as a good citizen? Why should I be deprived of work and burdened with the aches and pains of old age?"

The counselor listened attentively. "Do you see no pattern in what has happened to you?"

"If there is one," said the old man, "it is not very comforting. My life seems to have gone up in smoke. Society deprives me of work, and life enfeebles my body. Around the corner I see the shadowy face of death. Such a pattern, if it be one, is depressing and discouraging."

"Your condition," replied the counselor, "bears the seeds of opportunity."

"Opportunity!" exclaimed the old man. "I fail to discern it."

"The sun rises in the East," explained the counselor, "and sets in the West. In youth you faced the East, and were buoyed up by the ebullience of the dawn. Now you are facing the West, where the sun slowly disappears beyond the horizon."

"Where, then, is the opportunity?" the old man questioned.

"Ah, but you forget that the sunset reveals the stars," the counselor declared. "They gleam in the darkness of the vastitude of space. This greater reality is hidden by the brightness of the sun."

"How does this apply to me?" the old man wanted to know.

"Your life, like the sun, is setting, but you are not yet aware of the stars."

"You speak in symbols," observed the old man. "How does all this touch me?"

"You must learn to light your candle of guidance from the stars," the counselor said. "They must be approached in darkness, for they are surrounded by it. The body relates you to the earth, but the spirit, to the stars. As your terrestrial concerns fade, the larger dimensions of spiritual endeavor become more apparent."

"Are you saying, then," the old man interrupted, "that life is directing me to shift the focus of my thought from the domain of terrestrial things to that of spiritual realities?"

"I think you have sensed my meaning aright," the counselor nodded.

66. THE BLOOD OF THE MEDUSA

In the courtroom, the clerk's voice rang out as he called a name. A seedy-looking man stepped forward, and the judge scrutinized him carefully.

"Drunk and disorderly again?" the judge observed. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Your Honor," the man pleaded, "the world is just too full of temptations, and I can't resist them."

"You've had a good education," the judge pointed out, "yet you act as though you were brought up as an illiterate."

"I know, Your Honor," the man said somewhat defensively, "but I can't do anything about it. There is too much evil in the world, and I can't fight it."

The judge stroked his chin. "Mythology may provide you with an answer. According to legend, Aesculapius was a great healer in ancient times. As you may know, he discovered that the blood of the Medusa, a woman whose mien was so terrifying that she turned all who even looked at her into stone, had special virtues. The blood from the left side was poison, but that which flowed from the right side could raise the dead to life."

"That is an interesting observation," said the man, "but isn't it irrelevant?"

"Evil, like the Medusa's blood," explained the judge, "can either be a poison, or, if properly applied, a life-giving fluid."

"Do you mean, then," the man said, "that if I had the requisite skill I could change the evil into a nourishing essence of good?"

"That's what the myth suggests, doesn't it?"

"You're proposing a difficult task," the man said slowly.

"If Aesculapius could do it," the judge replied, "why can't you?"

67. DISCIPLE OF MOMUS

"To what do you ascribe your success?" a reporter asked a music critic.

"I ascribe it wholly to my ability to find fault with anybody, anywhere, and under all conditions," promptly answered the critic. "I cultivated this ability from childhood, and it has served to make me honored, and, I must add, feared."

"But hasn't your vast knowledge been a major factor?" the reporter inquired.

"Not at all," the critic asserted. "Even though I never learned to play a musical instrument, I can still criticize anyone who does."

"That seems rather strange to me," the reporter commented.

"It shouldn't be," the critic declared. "In most walks of life, the ability to find fault opens the door to success. I can listen to an almost flawless violin concerto that enthralls the auditors and yet write a scathingly derogatory article characterizing the performance as an amateurish display of incompetence. If the virtuoso is well-grounded in technique, I shall say he lacks heart, and if his tones are rich and mellow, I shall say that he lacks the restraint of classical objectivity. However highly acclaimed he be, I shall prove that his talent has been vastly overrated."

"Aren't there many persons who practice the art of belittlement?" the reporter questioned.

"True," agreed the critic, "but I have learned to make the harshest strictures plausible so that I can ruin an artist's reputation even when I seem to praise him."

The reporter went away perplexed. Later in the day, as he was having a cup of tea with a professor of classical Greek, he related the substance of his interview with the music critic.

"Isn't it strange," the reporter asked, "that fame should be accorded to a person whose major talent is finding fault with seasoned virtuosos?"

"Not at all," the professor declared. "Such people are disciples of Momus — a Greek god whose specialty was biting sarcasm and withering ridicule. Many persons who never heard of him are in fact his disciples. Other gods — Themis, for instance, who represents justice — are largely forgotten, but Momus finds converts in every age."

"But what kind of world would we have if our scholars worshipped at the shrine of Momus?" the reporter queried.

"Look about you," the professor remarked sententiously.

68. THE UNIVERSAL GIFTS

"What has anyone ever done for me?" complained the convict to the chaplain. "I never had a chance because I'm the victim of hard luck."

"But you have received gifts haven't you?" asked the chaplain.

"Gifts?" cried the convict. "What gifts have I ever received?"

"To begin with," the chaplain explained, "you have been granted the gift of life."

"Oh, that," exclaimed the convict somewhat deprecatingly, "why, everybody has that."

"It is the very source of all opportunities," the chaplain declared. "Without it, we are literally nothing. Second, you have been given the gift of thought."

"Thinking hurts my head," the convict muttered.

"The world was created out of thought," continued the chaplain. "God built the universe with it, but your task was simply to build a creative life. In addition, you received the triple gift of speech, silence, and song."

"I never thought of speech as a gift," the convict confessed.

"Ah, but it is," declared the chaplain. "Animals are not so fortunate. By speech alone, poets have ruled nations. Words are mighty powers for the expression of pyramid-building ideas."

"That's news to me," the convict commented, "but how is silence a gift?"

"In silence," the chaplain explained, "the great swans of thought gently waft creative ideas into the expectant consciousness of the seeker. In quietness the soul can make itself heard."

"Nobody ever told me that," the convict said a bit hesitantly.

"Song is the symbol of the voice of the inner self," the chaplain went on. "We're all supposed to make music with our lives. Some persons, however, produce profanity while others sound forth benedictions."

"Say," declared the convict, "if I have received all these splendid gifts, what am I doing in jail?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said the chaplain.

69. LIFE

None may escape me, for I am Life. To all men I offer opportunities. It is my power they use during their brief sojourn on earth, whether they know it or not.

I set them in the midst of earthly affairs so that they might make choices. At the end of their days, I assess what they have chosen — and am mostly disappointed. The possibility is provided of advancing from mortality to immortality, from ignorance to wisdom, and from the human to the divine, but not many travel along these paths. They choose the lesser portion.

One man chooses to drown his aspirations in drink. Another befuddles the mind with drugs. Some prefer earthly to spiritual riches. Many drown in a sea of emotion, refusing to rise to lofty heights on the wings of aspiring thought. A great number grasp for power, only to find that it is as illusory as the moon in a lake.

Here and there a person of heroic mold appears, who makes wise choices, refusing to pluck the fruits of illusion. For such lightbearers I wait as the centuries come and go. Some day, perchance, the earth will bear such heroes in greater numbers, but that hour has not yet struck. That time is near or far — an age or an aeon — but it could be now.

70. DESTINY AND BEAUTY

Once upon a time a scholar had tea with a monk and in the course of their conversation asked for light in regard to an overarching problem.

"What is the purpose of evolution?" he questioned. "What is the significance of the hurly-burly experiences that constitute my own life?"

"Where have you searched for the answer to this momentous question?" the monk asked, sipping his tea.

"I've read all sorts of books and pondered the matter for years," said the scholar, "but as yet I've found no clue."

"Perhaps you have searched in the wrong places," the monk suggested. "The answer is written in the sky."

"In the sky!" exclaimed the scholar. "I must confess I never looked there — but what kind of writing does one find in the firmament?"

"The dawn begins with a burst of resplendent beauty," replied the monk, "and sunset floods the world with the splendor of scintillating color."

"True," said the scholar, "but what of that? How does it answer my question concerning purpose?"

"The day begins and ends in beauty," said the monk, taking another sip of tea.

"Are you saying, then," cried the scholar, "that beauty was in the beginning and will also be in the end?"

"Just so," concurred the monk.

"And that each person should fashion his life so that beauty might be the dominant motif?"

The monk's eyes twinkled, but he said nothing and continued sipping his tea.

71. A NEW DOCTRINE

Rumor had it that a hermit who lived in a cave was teaching a strange doctrine. Stirred by this report, a theological student journeyed over land and sea in order to obtain a firsthand account of the insights that the recluse had gained.

After much searching, the student came face to face with the bearded hermit.

"It is said that you have achieved deep insights into the condition of the human race," the student began. "Might I ask what they are?"

"You may," replied the hermit mildly, "but I don't believe the human race is ready for my teaching."

"Oh, but I think you are mistaken," said the student. "As far as I can judge, the human race is ready for anything. Why don't you tell me what you have realized?"

"Very well, then," answered the hermit, "I'll try. Spiritual progress begins when a person learns to laugh at himself."

"I never heard that in theology classes," the student confessed.

"People are inclined to laugh at others, using humor to belittle and disparage, but fail to see that they themselves are fit subjects for gentle laughter."

"In what sense is this true?" the student inquired.

"Is there not an element of humor or incongruity in the human predicament?" asked the hermit. "We inhabit a frail, mortal body, but are in essence immortal. Most people are deceived, identifying themselves with their mortality and cherishing it, while disregarding their immortality, which is the very source of their greatness. It's like a miser who prefers to live like a beggar when he is in actuality rich."

"Isn't that tragic?"

"No, it's comical," retorted the hermit. "In fact, all folly and all ignorance, so prevalent everywhere, are subjects for laughter. The incongruous behavior of human beings, throwing away pearls and hoarding worthless gewgaws, should cause any thoughtful person to smile. The counsels of wisdom are available, but disregarded, yet men complain that they walk in darkness."

"But isn't life a serious matter?" queried the student.

"It's an illusion," returned the hermit, "and scientists have proved it so. We see objects when there are only atoms. Many persons don't catch sight of reality during an entire lifetime, yet they believe they perceive it all the time. This misapprehension has in it the elements of comedy."

"Do you think, then, that God has a sense of humor?" the student asked earnestly.

"I don't see how he could endure the human race if he hadn't," replied the hermit. "Human follies could only be tolerated where there is smiling love."

72. BEAUTY OR UGLINESS

A plain-looking girl came into the office of a social counselor and proceeded to unburden herself.

"All my troubles arise from the fact that life did not give me a beautiful face and figure," she complained. "I have even heard myself referred to as ugly. Other girls are sought after, pampered, and preferred, while I am scorned and left to myself. I have a strong feeling that I am unwanted. Why did fate play such a sorry trick on me?"

She continued for a time to descant on how life had victimized her, but finally left.

The next person who entered the office was a striking-looking blonde.

"Beauty has been a curse to me," she declared. "Nobody prizes me for what I am, but only for how I look. As a result, I've had a very unhappy marriage. Favors were showered on me because of my beauty, so that I never had to struggle for myself. I made the mistake of paying so much attention to my face that I neglected to develop my mind and disposition. Why did fate confer on me the fatal gift of beauty?"

At this point the social worker recalled his previous visitor — the one who had complained of ugliness.

When all three were together, he asked, "Is it better for a girl to be born beautiful or homely?"

"Beautiful," promptly answered the plain-looking girl.

"Homely," responded the striking-looking blonde.

For a long moment they looked at each other — and then smiled.

73. INSTRUMENT OF MUSIC

The son of a scholar had been studying Zen Buddhism with a monk, but despite diligent application made little progress. One day the young man expressed the frustration he felt to his father.

"I don't seem to be getting anywhere," he said disconsolately. "In spite of my best efforts, I seem to be standing still."

"Have you discussed this matter with your teacher?" his father inquired.

"Yes, I have," the young man replied, "but that seemed to be of no use."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing at all," replied his son. "He simply reached over to a shelf, picked up a flute, and handed it to me."

"How did you interpret his action?"

"I thought he was telling me in a diplomatic way that I'd do better studying music than continuing to work with him."

"Is any other interpretation possible?" his father questioned.

"If there is, I'm not aware of it," his son replied.

"Have you observed that the flute is hollow or empty, and requires but

breath and finger manipulation to produce music?"

"True," agreed his son, "but what of that?"

"May not a human being be like a flute?" his father suggested.

The young man's eyes lit up. "You mean, that a human being, like a flute, is meant to give forth music?"

"Develop that theme further," said his father.

"But in both there must be emptiness in order that the breath of inspiration can move through it and create the music?"

"If this be so," his father remarked, "what will you say to your teacher concerning his gift?"

"I shall return the flute," rejoined the son, "and tell him I shall practice my own instrument to produce a more ethereal music."

His father nodded.

74. PRICE AND VALUE

A music teacher and his pupil entered a shop where violins, clarinets, pianos, and other instruments were displayed. At the counter, they met the manager of the store, who let slip the information that he knew nothing whatsoever about music.

"I find it strange," commented the music teacher, "that you make a living selling musical instruments yet know nothing about the way in which music is produced."

"It's not at all strange," explained the manager. "I'm concerned only with price. For me, that's all that counts."

"As a musician, I'm concerned with the value," said the music teacher.

"I'm content to limit myself to the price and let others give thought to the value," the manager observed.

"Wouldn't it help if you appreciated both?"

"Not a bit," replied the manager. "It might only confuse me if I had to think in terms other than price."

"Do you ever take the soul into consideration?" inquired the teacher. "It, too, is a musical instrument."

"If it doesn't have a price tag, I can disregard it and not know the difference," replied the manager.

After leaving the store, the teacher and his pupil commented on the manager's views.

"He sees the whole world in terms of price," said the pupil. "It's like screening out a large part of a beautiful landscape by putting on colored glasses."

"Price ought to be derived from value," mused the teacher, "not separated from it."

"Were that so," the pupil observed, "the soul would be the most treasured musical instrument in the world."

"Some day it will be so," the teacher said, "but that time has not yet come."

75. WISDOM

A minister who had cultivated a taste for music was seated in his study when a young man hesitantly entered.

"What seems to be troubling you?" the minister asked.

"I read in the Bible that wisdom is the principal thing to strive for," he said in a bewildered manner.

"What of that?" asked the minister.

"I have never found a very satisfying definition of what wisdom signifies," the young man confided, "and if I don't know what it means, how can I even begin to strive for it? In fact, I've been looking for wise men for some time, but without success."

The minister pondered for a moment. Then he reached out and picked up a mandolin. "This instrument may indicate what you wish to know."

"That mandolin?" queried the young man somewhat perplexedly. "What can it tell me?"

"In it are untold melodies that await a skillful player to call them forth. So it is with our lives," the minister elaborated. "The music in us is also waiting to be called forth, but we need wisdom to do so. However, a blundering player will produce discordant tones, and even a competent player requires well-tuned strings."

"I begin to see your point," the young man nodded.

"The mandolin has four sets of strings that must be attuned to each other, however, before the harmonious tones can be produced."

"You imply, then," the young man ventured, "that the four components in our nature — the physical, emotional, psychic, and mental — must first be harmonized. Is that it?"

"Yes," replied the minister, "and each set is dual. Moreover, the fingerboard frets indicate the steps of the ascending scale. We must be able to deal with the lowest and with the highest, making music out of each."

"That certainly requires adaptability," the young man commented.

"When the mandolin does not give forth music," the minister went on, "it remains discreetly silent."

"Many people could profit by that example," the young man declared.

"The resonating chamber is empty," the minister pointed out, "so that the tones can resound more sonorously."

"In other words," the young man interpreted, "we must empty ourselves of egotistic selfhood."

"In addition," said the minister, "the mandolin doesn't play for itself, but for others."

"Isn't that the doctrine of service to our fellow man?"

"The time will come," said the minister, "when our lives, at a higher octave, will resound with the music of the soul."

"That really would be wisdom," the young man said appreciatively.

"Indeed, it would," replied the minister.

76. RESISTANCE TO EVIL

The lawyer representing a criminal approached the bench and asked that clemency be shown to his client.

"Your Honor," said the lawyer, "although my client has acknowledged the commission of a crime, I plead for leniency. He has, indeed, repented. For some time now he has been reading the Scriptures. He is, indeed, a new man."

The judge was quiet for a time. "Many people affirm the good," he said at last, "but that is not enough. They must also be able to resist evil. That is a far more difficult task."

"Aren't you being too severe?" the lawyer protested. "Isn't it enough to affirm the good?"

"The world would be a different place if it were," the judge replied. "The affirmation of good is but a small spark which can easily be extinguished. The appreciation of good can only be tested by resistance to evil."

"But who can define evil?" the lawyer questioned.

"If evil remains undefined," the judge reasoned, "of what value is the affirmation of good?"

"Your standard is too high," remonstrated the lawyer. "Almost all our counseling pertains to the appreciation of good. Little is said or understood about resistance to evil."

"Perhaps that's why your counseling fails," the judge declared. "Clemency denied."

77. MUSIC OF ORPHEUS

After being mustered out of the army, a soldier returned to civilian life. He found the readjustments difficult and bewildering. In the army, he was told what to do and had only to obey, but in civilian life there was no external authority to prescribe direction; all action was self-initiated. Confused by the new problems he faced, the former soldier went to a psychiatrist for counsel.

"In the army everything seemed clear to me," the soldier declared. "The objective was definite and unambiguous — overcoming the enemy. All I had to do was obey orders that came from my superior. In civilian life, the enemy is undefined, and no one is around to give orders. It's all very confusing, and I'm having a hard time adjusting."

Before speaking, the psychiatrist spent a moment pondering. "All war is

disharmony that results in battle. In civilian life, there is an analogous dissonance called evil that is resolved by conflict."

"But there is no battlefield and no cannon," the soldier protested.

"The issues are subtler," the psychiatrist explained. "The battlefield is in the heart and mind. The enemy is the disharmony called evil."

"I'm not at all sure I can recognize evil," the soldier said hesitantly.

"Can you recognize the difference between noise and music?" the psychiatrist inquired.

"That's easy," said the soldier, "but evil has learned to sing a song that counterfeits the music of good."

"That has always been so," the psychiatrist assented. "Legend tells us that the sirens or mermaids sing such bewitching songs that mariners, eagerly responding, steer their barks into rocky reefs and are shipwrecked."

"How can one avoid such a tragedy?" the soldier questioned. "We observe such shipwrecks daily."

"Ulysses, as Homer tells us," the psychiatrist declared, "told his mariners to stop their ears."

"That's hard to do," the soldier demurred.

"Orpheus, who sailed on the Argo," the psychiatrist said, "played such compelling music on his lyre that the songs of the sirens were drowned out."

"I'd like to learn the art of doing that," the soldier nodded.

"There is more music in man than in the instruments on which he plays," the psychiatrist pointed out, "but many people don't know it. Note, too, that Orpheus overcame the perils of the Underworld — that is, of hell — by the power of music. In the beginning, as we are told, was the Word, that is, the music of creation out of which the universe was born. Thereafter came the music of evolution with its inevitable dissonances that need to be resolved in ultimate harmony. What we must decide is whether our lives will add to the noise or suggest the divine harmony."

At this point, the soldier got up to leave.

"Where are you going?" the psychiatrist inquired.

"I am going forth to make music," the soldier replied.

78. PROFIT AND DUTY

Harassed by the pressures of business, an advertising executive had a nervous breakdown. He went to several doctors and psychiatrists, but their best efforts proved vain. Finally, in desperation, he went to see a person who had the reputation of being a sage.

After the advertising executive had explained the nature of his malaise, the sage asked questions.

"Can you tell me more about your work? What do you say to your clients, for example?"

"By the magic of advertising, I transform a bauble into a jewel," explained

the executive. "What nobody wants, I change into something that everybody desires. I can make a book that has no literary merit a best seller, and a foul-tasting whiskey into a popular favorite."

"Truly a transformation," murmured the sage, "but what is the value of such a talent?"

"It is extremely profitable," the executive exclaimed. "I become rich by stirring up desire for any product I wish to sell."

"Do you increase the value of the product?" the sage asked.

"Of course not," answered the executive. "I simply create a desire for it."

"Do I understand correctly, then," the sage wanted to now, "that you grow rich by multiplying the desires of people for material things?"

"Quite right," the executive said proudly.

"But I remain poor and persuade people to reduce their desires for material things."

The executive frowned. "You are challenging the very structure of my life style. My main incentive is profit. What should it be?"

"Duty," promptly answered the sage. "To see life through the spectacles of profit is distorting. What is profitable to you may be harmful to others and to the world. Duty involves the doing of what is beneficial to oneself, to others, and to society."

"If I adopted duty as a criterion, I'd have to change my entire life style," the executive said slowly.

"No doubt," responded the sage laconically.

79. DISCERN, WEIGH, JUDGE

A philologist sought to discover the meaning of life by studying languages. Years of patient labor, however, produced results below his expectations. Feeling that he had expended too much effort for too meager returns, he became disturbed. At this point, he decided to consult a metaphysician. In due time the confrontation took place.

"I have mastered eight languages," explained the philologist, "and find that people everywhere repeat the same patterns of thought, using different words to express similar ideas. They sing the same songs of selfishness, introducing now and then the motif of the ideal. This realization has had a depressing effect on me. That is my problem."

"You have studied many words," the metaphysician said, "but they are only the vehicles of purpose."

"What shall I do?" the philologist questioned.

"I shall give you only three words," the metaphysician said, "but I ex-

pect you to meditate on each one for a full year."

"I shall tell you how they sound in eight languages," said the philologist.

"The sound is less important to me than the sense," countered the metaphysician, "or, better said, the essence. The first word I give you is *discern*."

"What am I supposed to discern?" the philologist asked.

"Ponder on that question for a year," the metaphysician advised, "and then return with the answer."

After a year had passed, the philologist returned and disclosed the results of his protracted meditation.

"In most of the affairs of life," he reported, "the issues are unclear. Many people don't even know that they exist. Then, too, the issues are often incorrectly defined. Problems that are unrecognized cannot be solved, and those that are incorrectly evaluated yield questionable solutions. Discernment is of primary importance to define the nature of the issues with which life confronts us."

"The first step, then," said the metaphysician, "is to define the issues subtly, for many people deal only with their reflected shadows. I shall now give you the second word, namely *weigh*,"

The philologist left and returned at the end of a year.

"The issues that have been isolated and defined must be weighed on the scales of justice," he declared. "To know what the issues are without considering the destiny toward which their resolution will move us is unwise. Many solutions may be profitable to the personality, but detrimental to the soul. Then, too, good intentions may lead to disastrous decisions. Many people produce conditions that are the exact opposite of what they intended. Hence we must place all issues in the mental scales of justice if we would decide with wisdom."

"You have therefore concluded," the metaphysician elaboraed, "to discern subtly and to weigh wisely. I give you now the third word, *judge*."

After another year of pondering, the philologist returned to share what he had gained from his meditations.

"Of what value is it," he questioned, "if a person knows the issues and weighs them carefully without acting on his knowledge? Judgment must be rendered. A conclusion must be reached and a decision made in the light of what has been discovered. Many people understand the problems that confront them, but fail to bring them to the seat of judgment or to make a choice that is wise."

"Very well, then," replied the metaphysician. "You have rightly concluded that we must discern subtly, weigh wisely, and judge justly. Now that you know this, what do you intend to do?"

"I shall translate this knowledge into eight languages, the spokes of the wheel of truth," replied the philologist, "and so convert what I have discovered into creative action for the benefit of all. The greatest translation will concern the transformation of these ideas into the very structure of my life. My philology will thus become the metaphysics of the soul."

80. THE SPELL OF SONG

A certain clerk was beset with a problem. A melody he had heard kept recurring in his mind over and over again. It was so persistent that it interfered with his work and distracted him in his meditations. Finally he went to a psychiatrist for help.

"It's like a spell," the clerk said. "Wherever I may be, the song keeps going around in my head. What can I do about it?"

"Start humming a different melody," the psychiatrist suggested. "One song drives out another."

The clerk took his advice and found that it was effective.

"You have been a great help," said the clerk as he arose to leave.

"Have you understood the broader implications of my counsel?" the psychiatrist asked.

"Broader implications?" queried the clerk perplexedly. "Beyond helping me with my problem, I see none."

"Many people are under one spell or another, and listen to the same broken rhythms for an entire lifetime. For some it may be the search for pleasure and for others the lure of easy money or the removal of cares by drink or drugs."

"I see," nodded the clerk. "To drive out old rhythms, new ones should be introduced. But how can anybody know which song to substitute for the one that is echoing through his life?"

"The song of wisdom is the origin of which all others are faint and imperfect copies," replied the psychiatrist.

"Might it be," asked the clerk, "that we hear but broken chords of the harmony that moves the planets in their courses?"

"That song, when heard," said the psychiatrist, "will drown out all the lesser melodies."

81. DEFINITION OF TREASURE

An elderly businessman had accumulated a sizable fortune, but the thought of spending the rest of his life adding to a sum that was already sufficient for his needs was not at all to his liking. He explained his dilemma to an aged rabbi who spent his days poring over mystical books.

"I always thought that money was the greatest treasure I could work for," he explained, "but now that I have a fortune, I begin to have doubts. Inasmuch as I have enough and to spare, why should I always seek more?"

"Much depends on how you define *treasure*," the rabbi said thoughtfully. "For an animal, the greatest treasure is life. The serpent defends it with venom, the tiger, with teeth and claws, the bull, with horns, the skunk, with a fetid odor."

"True," acquiesced the businessman, "but I am not an animal."

"That's why your treasure is greater," countered the rabbi. "Nature has divested human beings of claws, horns, and other protective devices for a reason. In addition to the treasure of life, they have been given that of wisdom."

The businessman pondered. "Perhaps money is the shadow of wisdom."

"Such an assumption would be justified," concurred the rabbi. "As an animal defends its life, however, so must man guard the treasure of wisdom."

"If I don't know what it is," protested the businessman, "how can I defend it?"

"Your first task, then," observed the rabbi, "is to identify and prize it."

"I see," said the businessman, "but what lies beyond the treasures of life and wisdom?"

"There is another I can think of," responded the rabbi meditatively, "but not too many people seem to understand it."

"What is it?" the businessman wanted to know.

"The treasure of our spiritual destiny," replied the rabbi.

"Spiritual destiny!" cried the businessman. "People can't even recognize wisdom, let alone defend it. How, then, can they begin to grasp the nature of their spiritual destiny?"

"That's the problem," the rabbi said quietly.

82. INHERITANCE

A psychologist visited the home of a man who had recently lost an uncle. As he sat in the dining room , the visitor noticed a mandolin in a far corner.

"Are you interested in music?" the psychologist inquired.

"Not really," the heir replied. "The mandolin was bequeathed to me by my recently deceased uncle, but I don't know how to play it. There it sits in the corner of this room gathering dust."

"Why don't you learn to play?" the psychologist probed.

"I'm much too busy to do that," the heir explained. "I'd like to, but I don't have the time."

"In other words, you refuse to call forth the music that sleeps in yonder instrument," observed the psychologist. "The means are available, but you refuse to take advantage of them."

"I never thought of it in that way," the heir responded thoughtfully.

After this conversation had taken place, the heir reconsidered the matter and decided to learn how to play the musical instrument that had been bequeathed to him. He practiced assiduously and so gained a fair degree of proficiency.

A year later, the psychologist once again paid a visit. This time the heir pointed to the mandolin and declared, "I thought about what you said and learned how to play on the instrument I inherited."

"I am glad you have done so," the psychologist said, "but there was a deeper meaning in my observations."

"A deeper meaning?" exclaimed the heir. "I fail to understand."

"We have all inherited the instrument with which we appear in time and space. It, too, is capable of sounding many creative songs, but, quite humanly, we fail to play it competently."

The heir stroked his chin thoughtfully. "You have enlarged the dimensions of my problem," he said finally. "How long would it take me to learn to play this superior instrument?"

"Only a lifetime," observed the psychologist with a faint smile.

83. WEBS

A professor of philosophy married a woman who soon learned that he was more interested in speculation than in action. One day, for example, she saw that spiders had built a series of webs in the attic. She gave him a broom and told him to remove them. He disappeared into the attic and for thirty minutes there was quiet.

Hearing nothing, she finally went to investigate. Her husband was standing in the middle of the attic, lost in thought.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm fascinated by the web as a symbol," he observed.

"A symbol?" she cried. "To me they're a reality."

"Have you ever considered that the whole of what we call life is a great web in which all of us are entangled?"

"The very idea makes me feel very uncomfortable," she protested.

"Inside us is the network of the nervous system — another kind of web. Our very thoughts form a reticulum that determines our destiny."

"That may be," she said, "but I don't like these specimens in our attic."

"The cosmos itself may be a vast web, every part of which is related to every other. The fate of the earth may be tied up with the destiny of the universe."

"That is all very well," his wife retorted, "but what are you going to do about those ugly spider webs that are decorating the corners of our attic?"

"The spider doesn't get entangled in its own web," mused the philosopher, "but human beings are often not that wise."

"This is getting us nowhere," she declared. Thereupon she took the broom from his hands and cleared out the web-infested corners herself.

84. NOTES

With furrowed brow the composer labored on his score, placing his notes carefully on the staves before him. He struck resounding chords on the piano as he listened inwardly to the melody he sought to transcribe. Hour after hour he worked until it was after midnight. At that point he sighed heavily, turned

out the light, and retired to another room.

The moonlight that filtered into the room where the piano stood revealed an interesting scene. By some magical process, the notes seemed to become invigorated with a life of their own. They moved, hummed, and even began to speak.

"Just fancy," said an eighth note, "I have been placed all the way at the bottom of the bass clef by our creator-composer. I wonder whether he understands how I feel occupying such a low position on his score."

"Now that you mention it," a quarter note declared, "I really think he is wrong in choosing to compose in the signature of a key which has so many flats. I'd much rather be a sharp. It's much more exciting than being cast in the role of an insipid flat."

At this point a half note ventured to speak. "Why does he insist on writing in a minor key? It's far too plaintive and melancholy for me."

A sixteenth note became impatient. "Can't we do something about our grievances? Have we no freedom? Must we allow ourselves to be moved about capriciously at the pleasure of a mere composer?"

The notes as a whole began to vibrate with excitement and rebellion.

As they were debating, the composer suddenly returned to the room, picked up the score and tore it to pieces, for he, too, appeared to be dissatisfied.

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